



SECRET
of
The Sea



A SECRET OF THE SEA.

A Novel.

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AUTHOR OF

“IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT,” “UNDER LOCK AND KEY,” ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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A SECRET OF THE SEA.

CHAPTER I.

ELEANOR'S RESOLVE.

“  M in no particular hurry, doctor, to get back to London,” Sir Thomas Dudgeon had quietly hinted to his medical man. “ I daresay the House can get on without me quite as well as with me, so you needn’t hurry yourself to say I’m fit for harness again till you feel quite sure in your own mind that I am so.”

Dr. Welstead was not slow to take the hint, and he kept on calling at Stammars

two or three times a week, and sending one innocuous draught after another, which draughts Sir Thomas conscientiously poured into the ash-pan when his wife was not looking, till the baronet's holiday had extended itself to the beginning of May. But by this time Sir Thomas looked so well and rosy, and was in possession of such a hearty appetite, that a vague suspicion that she was being duped began to haunt her ladyship's mind. She said nothing to her husband, but made her preparations in silence. Then, one morning at the breakfast-table, the shell exploded.

“ To-day is Wednesday, dear,” she said, “ and I have made all arrangements for our going up to town on Saturday morning. Dr. Welstead seems quite at a loss how to treat you: indeed, country practitioners, as a rule, are not competent to deal with anything beyond a simple case of measles ; so on Saturday afternoon I will myself drive you to see Sir Knox Timpany, and wait for you while you consult that eminent authority, who, I doubt not, will make you as well as

ever you were, in the course of a very few das."

Sir Thomas fumed and fretted, but her ladyship was inexorable. Go he must; and when he saw there was no help for it, he made a merit of necessity; but at the same time he registered a silent vow that not all the wives in England should drag him to the door of Sir Knox Timpany.

At the last moment, however, the baronet and Gerald started for London alone. Late on Friday, Lady Dudgeon received a telegram. Her only sister was very ill, and it was needful that she should hurry off without an hour's delay. "Considering all that I have done for Caroline, it is really very ungrateful of her to be ill at a time like this," she grumbled to her husband. "She knew how anxious I was to get back to town, and she might have doctored herself up for another month or two. I hope to goodness she won't die till the season is over. I can't bear myself in mourning."

"Your only sister, my dear," remarked

Sir Thomas, soothingly. "I wouldn't leave her, if I were you, while there's the least danger. Your conscience might prick you afterwards, you know."

"Stuff!" was her ladyship's rejoinder. "Of course, I shall do what is proper; but if I were to die to-morrow, Caroline's first thought would be how soon after that event she might begin to wear flounces again."

Without wishing his sister-in-law any harm, Sir Thomas would not have been sorry if her illness had kept his wife at her bedside for half a year. The thought of having a few weeks, or even a few days, in London, without being supervised by her ladyship, was to bring back the feelings of his youth when school broke up for the summer holidays. In fact, during the three weeks that elapsed before her ladyship joined him in town, he was more like a schoolboy let loose than the fancy sketch of him with which the *Pembridge Gazette* one week favoured its readers, wherein he was described as a senator, grave and staid, whose trained and powerful intellect was

perpetually engaged in grappling with the most tremendous social and political problems of the age.

After a little dinner, quiet and early, at which Gerald generally sat down with him, Sir Thomas would post off to the House. But an hour or an hour and a half there was quite enough for him. Whist and a prime cigar at his club were far preferable to prosy speeches by people whom he did not know, and on subjects about which he did not care twopence.

Since the day of his confession in the library, Gerald had seen very little of Eleanor. If they met casually in passing from one room to another, a bow and a faint smile was all the greeting that passed between them. When they met at the dinner-table, no ordinary observer would have noticed any difference in their demeanour towards each other. Gerald talked as much as ever he had done : he knew that Sir Thomas and his wife liked him to make talk for them : but fewer of his observations were now addressed directly

to Miss Lloyd than used to be the case at one time. Sometimes he even turned over the music for Eleanor when she played after dinner ; but had Lady Dudgeon been the most Argus-eyed of dowagers, instead of the most unsuspicious, she could not possibly have found fault with his demeanour on such occasions. He was Sir Thomas Dudgeon's secretary—and nothing more.

Eleanor had received his confession in a spirit somewhat different from what he had expected. He had thought that her pride would be more deeply wounded by the deception he had practised on her than it appeared to be. That it was wounded, he knew full well ; but when he parted from her at the close of the interview, he did not fail to notice the quiver of her lip, and the longing, wistful look in her eyes. In his previous thoughts of her, it was evident he had not calculated sufficiently on the effect which his frank confession and prayer for forgiveness would have on a generous and loving disposition like that

of Eleanor. It seemed by no means unlikely, as Gerald said to himself afterwards, when thinking over the interview, that she had indeed so far forgiven him as to make his reinstatement in her regards the question merely of a little time and perseverance ; and under other circumstances he would not have allowed a day to pass without attempting a renewal of his suit. But fixed as he was just then, he could not bring his mind to the adoption of such a course. That he had fallen somewhat in Eleanor's esteem, that he had sunk to a lower level in her thoughts, he could not doubt ; and however much she might feel inclined to forgive him, it was questionable whether—had the circumstances of the case really been such as she believed them to be —she could ever have looked upon him with quite the same eyes as before. Such a change as this Gerald did not care to face. He preferred that, for a little while, she should think all was over between them ; that he had given up all thoughts of winning her for his wife. He knew that

before very long she would have to be told everything, and till that time should come he would speak no word of love to her again. The more hardly she thought of him now, the greater would be the rebound towards him when, from other lips than his, she should hear the whole strange story that must soon be told her.

About a fortnight after sending his first letter to Kelvin, Gerald followed it up with another. But again came the same answer as before, that Mr. Kelvin was still too ill to attend to business. Gerald was debating in his own mind as to the advisability of going over to Pembridge and seeking an interview with Kelvin, when the receipt of certain news from Ambrose Murray decided him to wait a short time longer. Murray told him the result of the inquiries in Wales, and how he and Peter Byrne were going to start for Marhyddoc in the course of a few days; and Gerald was entreated to follow them as quickly as possible. Under these circumstances there seemed to Gerald no necessity for troubling Kelvin

any further at present. Should Ambrose Murray find that which he was going to Wales to search for, then would all necessity for concealment on his part be at an end. One of his first acts would be to ask for the daughter who knew him not. Then would come the time for Gerald to say who and what he was. His first act after Eleanor knew that he was no longer John Pomeroy, the poor secretary, but Gerald Warburton, the heir to Mr. Lloyd's wealth, would be to tell her how truly he still loved her, and to ask her to become his wife. Let her, for a week or two longer, think that he had yielded her up without a struggle : in a very little while she should discover that no power on earth could make him yield her up—nothing, save her own deliberate dismissal of him, could do that.

Thus it was that Gerald left Stammars without saying a word of farewell to Eleanor ; and she, sitting half heart-broken by the window of her own room, saw him drive off to the station, and cried after him,

“Oh, my darling, why have you left me ?
Perhaps I shall never see you again.”

Gerald had only done Eleanor simple justice when he said to himself that she was ready to forgive and forget the past. “He has confessed everything to me, and confession is atonement,” she said to herself. “He need not have said a word to me, had he been so minded ; but the very fact of his telling me is proof sufficient that he is no longer seeking to win me for my money, but for myself only.”

Day by day she had been expecting to receive some word, some look even, from him which would tell her that his feelings were still unchanged ; but day passed after day, and neither word nor look was vouchsafed her. She was chilled and hurt by Gerald’s persistent silence and evident avoidance of her. Could it be, she asked herself, that he thought he had sinned past forgiveness ? To prove that such was not the case, she would be more gracious and complaisant towards him than she had ever been

before. She would endeavour to let him see, as far as a modest maiden might do so, that he had nothing to fear ; that the past was forgiven, and that the future rested with himself alone. But Gerald might have been made of marble, so cold and impassive did he seem to the tender-hearted girl, who had only discovered of late how fondly she loved him.

Then her pride came to her aid, and she tried her best to emulate Gerald's indifference. She laughed and talked, and seemed altogether merrier than of old ; but no one knew what she suffered in the solitude of her own room.

Now it was that she determined to put into execution a project that had been more or less in her thoughts for a long time. She was tired of the empty, frivolous life that she had been leading for some time past. It had seemed very pleasant to her while the freshness lasted, but that had now worn off, and she had made up her mind that she would have no more of it—or only a taste of it now and then as a

relief from more serious duties. What she wanted was some plain, earnest work to do—some work that would benefit others as well as herself. For a long time she had seemed like one groping in the dark; but at last she thought she saw a clear line of duty marked out for her footsteps, the following of which might not be altogether without avail.

And now her purpose grew firm within her. All was at an end between her and Pomeroy. She had only herself to consult. In hard work she might, perchance, find an anodyne for her wound. In any case, she would try to do so.

“I suppose, my dear, that you won’t object to give me a month at Baden this autumn?” said Lady Dudgeon to her husband, as they sat together one morning, about a couple of days before their projected return to London.

“Oh, ho! it’s come to that, has it?” answered the baronet. “Well, I suppose you must have your own way in the matter, although you know that I hate both the

place and the class of people one meets there. I suppose we can take Eleanor with us? It will be a treat to her, and company for you."

"Eleanor's a little fool!"

"Possibly so; you know best, I dare say."

"She tells me that she is going to leave us."

"Eleanor going to leave us!"

Sir Thomas looked quite dumbfounded. At this moment Eleanor entered the room.

"What is this I hear, little one?" he cried. "You are not going to leave us, surely?"

"For a little while, dear Sir Thomas. Perhaps not for long," answered Eleanor.

"I'm sorry for that—very sorry indeed. I had grown to like you almost as much as if you were a daughter of my own."

Tears came into Eleanor's eyes. She crossed the room, and taking Sir Thomas's hand in both hers, pressed it to her lips.

"My gratitude—my love, if you care for it—will always be yours! I can never re-

pay even a tithe of the kindness shown me by Lady Dudgeon and yourself."

"Eleanor, I have no patience with you!" cried Lady Dudgeon, dipping her pen viciously in the inkstand.

"But where is the girl going, and what is she going to do?" asked the baronet.

"Let her answer for herself."

"You will think it very strange of me, I dare say," said Eleanor; "but Miss Mulhouse, whose name is no doubt familiar to you, has offered to find me a position in one of the Homes for Destitute Girls, which she is trying to establish in different parts of London."

"Heaven bless us!" exclaimed Sir Thomas. "You don't mean to say that you are going to leave a place like Stammars on purpose to spend your days in a back slum in the east end of London?"

"I am going to try to find something to do," said Eleanor. "I am going to try to make myself of some little use in the world."

"A madcap scheme, my dear—I can call

it nothing else," said the old gentleman, with a melancholy shake of the head. " If you feel charitably disposed, a twenty-pound note at Christmas, judiciously laid out, will go a long way—a very long way, indeed."

" To give money alone does not seem to me enough. I want to work for those poor helpless ones ; to labour for them with head and hands ; to learn their histories and their wants ; to win their sympathies, and to make their lives a little less hard, if I can possibly do so."

" My dear," said Sir Thomas, turning to his wife, " what a pity it is that you have not found a husband for Miss Lloyd !"

" Miss Lloyd has had three most eligible offers since she placed herself under my care."

" And she refused them ?"

" Every one."

" Then her case must be a hopeless one indeed."

" I have argued and reasoned with her, but all to no purpose," said her ladyship.

“She is determined to have her own headstrong way. But I prophesy that before six months are over we shall have Miss Lloyd back at Stammars, tired and disgusted with a task which may look very nice in theory, but which must be excessively unpleasant when reduced to practice.”

“She will always be welcome at Stammars whenever she likes to come back to us.”

“You won’t think me ungrateful for leaving you, will you, Sir Thomas?” pleaded Eleanor.

“That I won’t, my dear. I’ll never think anything but what’s good of you.”

Thus it was that Eleanor Lloyd, sitting in the window of her room, watching Gerald Warburton drive away, cried to herself, “Perhaps I shall never see him again !”



CHAPTER II.

POD'S STRATAGEM.

AYS and weeks passed away, but still Matthew Kelvin did not get better. His condition fluctuated strangely. Sometimes for days together there would be a slow but sure improvement. Appetite and strength would alike increase, and his mother would grow glad at heart, thinking that she should soon see him out and about again, and as well as ever. But some morning, without the least warning, there would come a terrible relapse, which, in the course of two or three hours, would undo the improvement that it

had taken days to effect, flinging him helplessly back, as some strong wave flings back a desperate swimmer the moment his foot touches the shore, leaving him, buffeted and bruised, and with decreased strength, to struggle again from the same point that he started from before. So it was with Matthew Kelvin. There were times and seasons, after one of these strange relapses, when to those about him he seemed on the very verge of the grave—times and seasons when the patient himself prayed that if there were to be no release from his sufferings but death, then that death might come, and come quickly. Then would Dr. Druce be summoned in hot haste by Mrs. Kelvin. Presently the old gentleman would totter slowly into the room, smile blandly round at the anxious faces about him, and, both by his manner and words, quietly pooh-pooh their exaggerated alarm.

“I told you from the first,” he would cheerfully remark, “that the case was an obstinate one, and you must not allow these apparent relapses to alarm you. The dying

struggles of disease are often the most severe. The garrison will sometimes make its most desperate sortie after it knows that in the course of a few days it will be compelled to capitulate unconditionally. For the present the pain is over. I will send a composing draught, which the patient must take at once ; and to-morrow I doubt not but we shall find ourselves much stronger and better."

Better next day Mr. Kelvin would undoubtedly be, but not stronger. Each one of these mysterious relapses seemed to leave him a little weaker than before, a little less able to cope with the enemy that seemed bent on sapping away his life by slow degrees. But of this he hinted nothing to his mother. Her anxiety on his account was deep enough already ; there was no need to add to her distress ; so he kept his own counsel, and put a cheerful face on the matter, and would declare, on waking after one of the composing draughts, that he felt stronger and better than he had felt for weeks.

If any of Mrs. Kelvin's friends ever hinted to her that Dr. Druce was very old and very infirm, and that it might perhaps be advisable to seek some further advice, the old lady was up in arms in a moment. "Because people are old and not quite so active as they may once have been, I hope they are not necessarily fools!" she would tartly remark. "If that is the case, I must be a great fool, indeed. Dr. Druce has practised in Pembridge for fifty years, and if his experience is not worth more than that of a man thirty years his junior, I should like to know what is the good of experience at all. No, no; the older a doctor grows the cleverer he must become, if he has any brains at all." After such an outburst as this, there was nothing more to be said, especially as the patient himself seemed to have every confidence in Dr. Druce's skill and ability to cope with the strange malady from which he was suffering.

Nothing more was now said about Olive Deane's return to her duties at Stammars.

It was an understood thing that she could not possibly be spared while her cousin's health remained as it was at present. Lady Dudgeon had very kindly consented to keep the situation open for her for a few weeks longer, in the hope that by that time Mr. Kelvin's health might be so far restored as to allow of Olive's resumption of her duties ; but Olive, though she said nothing, had far different objects in view. She laughed to herself when she read Lady Dudgeon's note, and then tossed it contemptuously into the fire.

She had, indeed, long before this time, contrived to render herself indispensable both to her aunt and her cousin. She could not always be in the sick-room. Many were the hours that she and her aunt sat together alone. Such hours she did her best to brighten by means of pleasant, genial talk and long readings from her aunt's favourite books, and the old lady was proportionately grateful.

“ I often feel as if you had always lived with us,” she would sometimes say to

Olive. "You seem altogether like one of ourselves, and however we shall be able to let you go again, I can't tell. If Matthew were a marrying man, he might do worse, my dear, than make you his wife. But that is out of the question, for I don't suppose he will ever marry now."

Olive was not quite so sure on that point as her aunt seemed to be. Her affectionate devotion to her cousin seemed as if it were about to bear fruit at last. He could not bear to let any one but Olive wait upon him or minister to his needs.

Even to his mother he once or twice spoke with a slight tinge of impatience; coming after Olive, her waiting upon him seemed slow and bungling indeed. "If you would only sit down in that easy chair, mother, and let Olive attend to me!" he would say. "I want you to tell me all the gossip, and not to be bothering yourself and me about the quality of my beef-tea."

As for having any common paid nurse to

wait upon him, that was altogether out of the question now.

As he sat in his easy-chair one day, propped up with pillows and sipping at a cup of barley-water, while Olive sat on a low hassock close by, waiting till he should be ready to give her the cup, he said to her suddenly, after a long silence: "I believe, Olive, that if I ever do get better—which I sometimes doubt—I shall owe my life far more to your care and attention than to old Druce's filthy mixtures. I shall never know how to repay you. I never knew that you had half the splendid qualities in you that you have shown of late. But we men can hardly ever see farther than our noses where a woman is concerned. I am afraid I shall have to remain your debtor to the end of the chapter."

"You talk very great nonsense, Matthew," she said, in a voice that was hardly louder than a whisper. "You my debtor, indeed!"

One of her cousin's hands rested on the

arm of his chair ; by accident, it may be, one of Olive's hands found its way to the same place. Their fingers touched. Matthew put down his empty cup, and taking Olive's hand in both his, drew her towards him. Then he put one arm round her neck, and drawing her face close to his, he kissed her on the forehead. They both looked round with a start. Mrs. Kelvin had quietly opened the door, and was standing there with a smile on her face.

"Two's company—three's none," said the old lady, pleasantly. "I'll go back to my room for a little while, and next time I come I will be discreet enough to cough before opening the door."

"You dear old goose!" said Kelvin. "If cousins may not kiss, who may?"

"Oh, don't think that I object to your kissing each other!" cried the old lady. "That sort of medicine might do you more good than any other."

"By Jove, now, I never thought of that!" cried Kelvin, with a laugh. "Only,

in the present case, it was altogether a one-sided affair. It was not Olive who was kissing me, but I who was kissing Olive."

These were the last words that Olive heard, as, with face aflame, she hurried from the room ; but what had just happened was enough to fill her with strange, rapturous thoughts, and to strengthen hopes that were beginning to droop and grow faint for want of sustenance. *Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte.* The ice was broken ; the first step was taken ; everything else would follow in due course.

No after allusion was made either by Matthew or his mother to the scene just described, but Olive flattered herself by imagining that there was a warmth, a significance, in her cousin's manner now, such as she had never noticed before. If he would but speak ; if he would but breathe one word to which she could pin her faith—that she could treasure up even as a half promise that he would make her his wife—from that very day his illness should begin to leave him ! But at present she dare not

falter in the course she had laid down for herself. Were he to recover suddenly now, all thoughts of her and her services would be quickly swept from his mind by the inrush of hopes, cares, pleasures, and anxieties of everyday life, which the flood-gates of sickness had for a time partially shut out. Every additional day that kept him helpless in her hands was so much gain to her hopes. The more deeply he continued to feel the need of her and her services, the more likely was his gratitude to lead him by imperceptible degrees into the easy pathway of love. If he had not loved her a little he would hardly have kissed her as he did. Let him but seal those kisses with a word, and from that moment the breath of returning life should fill his nostrils ; while no man should ever have a wife more tender and devoted than she would be to him. How bitterly it made her heart ache to see him lying there in pain, which she alone could relieve but dare not—to see him wasting day by day into a haggard, gaunt-eyed skeleton of his former

self—no one but herself could ever more than faintly imagine. “If he were to die, I should poison myself an hour after. But he won’t do that. Suddenly, some day, the scales will fall from his eyes, and he will know that he loves me and that I love him ; and that love shall bring him back to life and health from the verge of the grave itself!”

Pod Piper was a frequent visitor in his master’s sick-room. Whenever Mr. Kelvin felt himself a little better, he would send for Pod and dictate sundry instructions, chiefly replies to some of his many correspondents, which that young gentleman would take down in shorthand, to be copied out afterwards in the office downstairs. Of course, there were times when it was requisite that Mr. Bray, the head-clerk, should see his employer in person ; but as he happened to be slightly afflicted with deafness, the labour of talking to him was sometimes too much for Mr. Kelvin, so he dispensed as much as possible with the necessity of seeing him. To Olive Deane

it seemed far better that if any one must see her cousin frequently on matters of business, that person should be a simple country lad, the chief occupation of whose mind probably was to wonder what he should have for dinner, rather than that quietly observant Mr. Bray, who seemed to see so much and to say so little. So to Pod she was always coldly gracious, and when he had finished with Mr. Kelvin upstairs, he generally found a piece of bread and jam, or a slice of cake, or an orange, on the hall table, put there for him by Olive herself. Whatever the article might be, it made no difference to Pod : he treated them all with the strict impartiality of a hungry lad : but his private opinion with regard to Miss Deane was not modified one iota thereby. He could not forget the scene between her and Mr. Pomeroy ; he could not forget the base plot of which he had overheard the details, and of which his favourite, Miss Lloyd, was to be the victim.

“She’s a snake in the grass, if ever there

was one," Pod would often remark confidentially to himself, even while in the very act of munching the bread and jam which Miss Deane had prepared for him.

"Doesn't the governor seem to have got fond of her all of a sudden!" remarked Pod, parenthetically to himself, one day, as he was marching slowly downstairs from the sick man's room. "Nobody else must wait upon him, or even be near him. It's disgusting!"

There was a splendid orange waiting for him on the hall table this morning. He took it with him to his den to enjoy in secret; but all the time he was sucking the orange, his thoughts were with his master and Miss Deane. "How close she sticks to him! Seems as if she couldn't bear even the old lady to go near him. What a funny thing it is he don't get better! I don't believe Dr. Druce, who's no better than an old woman, knows a bit what's the matter with him. I've seen him two or three times when he's had one of his bad attacks on him, and I'm blessed

if I don't have a jaw with Dr. Whitaker about it. *He's* something like a doctor."

The Dr. Whitaker alluded to by Pod was a young practitioner who had been settled in Pembridge some five or six years. Some professional difference of opinion had arisen between him and Dr. Druce over a case to which they had both been called in, and the older man no longer recognized the younger when they passed each other in the street, or even spoke of him otherwise than in a tone of polite contempt: all of which in no wise troubled Dr. Whitaker, who plodded his way through life with a kind word and a pleasant smile for everybody—even including old Dr. Druce.

Kelvin and he had met several times at the houses of mutual friends, and had learned to know and like each other: and when the former was taken ill, Dr. Whitaker was the man he would have liked to attend him; but he knew that to have breathed such a wish to his mother would almost have broken her heart, so firmly did she pin her faith to Dr. Druce.

If there was one thing that easy-going Dr. Whitaker detested more than another, it was having to make out his own bills. In order to obviate this disagreeable necessity, he had taken of late to employing Pod Piper as his secretary. Pod wrote a capital hand for a youngster, and was only too well pleased to be able to earn a few shillings now and again by working after office-hours. Everybody in Pembridge knew of Mr. Kelvin's illness by this time, and Dr. Whitaker seldom saw Pod without inquiring after him. Thus it was that Pod saw his way to bring under the notice of Dr. Whitaker easily, and as if in the course of ordinary conversation, that which he was growing anxious to tell him.

Accordingly, the next time Dr. Whitaker put his usual query, "How has the governor been to day?" Pod was prepared to go more into detail than he had ever done before.

"Much the same as usual, sir, thank you," he answered. "But if I may make so bold as to say so, my opinion is that Dr. Druce is no better than an old woman. It's

the liver, he says—nothing but the liver. If that's all that's the matter, why don't he cure it? Now, if master would only send for you, sir, I'm sure you would soon put him all right again."

"Piper," said Dr. Whitaker, as he leisurely proceeded to light a cigar, "Dr. Druce is one of the antiquities of Pembridge, and antiquities should always be respected. Oblige me by getting on with your work."

Dr. Whitaker went out, and was gone for upwards of an hour. When he got back, Pod was putting away his papers for the night. "He was dreadfully sick this morning when I was in the room," remarked Pod, quietly, as if there had been no hiatus in the conversation. "In fact, there's hardly a day passes that he isn't dreadfully sick. But of course it's all the liver."

"Ah, ah! he's often sick, is he?" And then Dr. Whitaker whistled a few bars below his breath. "Is his sickness accompanied or followed by any particular pain,

or any peculiar sensation, do you know?" he said, in a minute or two.

It is not needful that Pod's answer should be set down here. It is sufficient to say that whatever it was it put a sudden end to the young doctor's careless mood. He lighted another cigar, and made Pod sit down opposite to him, and questioned him closely and minutely for upwards of half an hour; and when at last he let him go, it was with a caution not to say a word to anyone about their interview. "Watch closely, and tell me everything," he said. "To-day is Tuesday; you will come to me at seven on Thursday evening. Contrive to be as much with your master during the interval as you can be without exciting suspicion, and note particularly those points which I have specified."

Fortune favoured Pod next morning more than he would have dared to expect. He was called up, as usual, to take down Mr. Kelvin's notes in shorthand. Kelvin, this morning, seemed feebler than usual, and was obliged to pause several times while

dictating his instructions. He had got about half-way through the morning's letters, when Miss Deane came in with a cup of tea in her hand. "Take a little of this, Matthew," she said. "It will help to revive you."

He was sitting up in bed, propped up with pillows. He took the tea and sipped at it. "It's a little too hot," he said. "I will drink it presently."

Olive was in the act of putting the cup and saucer on the little table which stood close to her cousin's hand, when there came a hurried knocking at the room door, and next moment the head of one of the servants was intruded into the room. "Oh ! if you please, miss," said the girl, "Mrs. Kelvin has met with a little accident. She slipped just now as she was coming down-stairs. I don't think she's much hurt, but she wants you to go at once."

Leaving the cup and saucer on the little table, Olive hurried from the room.

"Send me up word, Olive, as soon as you can, whether anything serious is the

matter," her cousin said to her as she was going.

He was evidently anxious. "We will leave the papers for a little while, Piper," he said, presently. "We shall have some news from dowstnairs before long." Then he took the tea and drank a little of it. "I don't know how it is," he said, more as if speaking to himself than addressing Pod, "but of late everything seems to have such a queer taste."

The cup was still in his fingers when Olive opened the door.

"There's nothing to alarm you, Matthew," she said; "nothing serious the matter. Aunt missed the bottom stair as she was coming down. She is a little shaken—nothing worse. If you don't want me just now I will go and sit with her for a little while."

"Go, by all means. Piper and I have not quite finished," said Kelvin. "I am very glad indeed that nothing more serious is the matter."

Olive left the room, and Kelvin put the

cup and saucer back on the table. Then he took up a long letter which he had partly read before, and Pod expected he was going to finish it ; but, after reading a few lines, he paused, as though considering some point in his mind. He was still holding the letter, still evidently thinking about it, when, by-and-by, he shut his eyes. Pod thought that he had shut them in order to think out more clearly the case before him : perhaps he had. But in the course of two or three minutes the hand that held the letter relaxed its grasp, and Mr. Kelvin's low, regular breathing indicated that he was asleep.

Pod Piper had been sitting very quietly all this time, thinking chiefly of what Dr. Whitaker had talked to him about last evening. Now that his master was asleep, there was nothing to hinder him from taking a long look at him, and tears came into the lad's eyes as he gazed at the hollow-eyed, sunken-cheeked wreck before him. "If this is her doing—if her hand has done this —she must be a daughter of the devil himself!" muttered Pod.

He never could tell afterwards what prompted the thought to enter his mind, but all at once, while gazing at the sleeping man, his face flushed, his eyes brightened, and he rose nervously from his chair. Yes: the breakfast-cup was on the little table, and still three-parts filled with tea. On another table near the door were a couple of empty physic-bottles, put there for the servant to take away. Pod's mind was made up in a moment. Another glance at the sleeper convinced him that there was no present fear from that quarter. Stepping lightly and on tiptoe, he went round the foot of the bed to the other side. Then he took the cup of tea and crossed the room with it to the table on which the empty bottles were standing. One of these bottles he uncorked, and into it, with the loss of a few drops only, he dexterously contrived to pour the tea. Then he recorked the bottle, hid it carefully away in his pocket, and put back the cup on to the little table. That done, he quietly resumed his seat by the sleeping man.

Five minutes later, Miss Deane came into the room. Pod warned her by a gesture that Mr. Kelvin was asleep. She stood gazing at him for a moment, and then she glanced across at the tea-cup. "Did he drink his tea before going to sleep?" she whispered to Pod.

"Yes—every drop of it," answered Pod, without a moment's hesitation.

She took up the cup and saucer and one or two other things, and moved towards the door. Then she took up the empty bottle, and then she looked round as if searching for the other one. Pod was furtively watching her, and his heart came into his mouth. She stood for a moment as if in doubt, but not being quite sure, apparently, whether there had been one bottle or two, she made no remark, but went out of the room as quietly as she had come in.

In ten minutes she was back again. Kelvin was still asleep. "I think there is no need for you to wait any longer," she whispered to Pod. "Mr. Kelvin may sleep

for an hour, or even longer. Should he want you when he awakes, I will send for you."

So Pod went, and very thankful he was to get away. When the dinner-hour came, he rushed off at once to Dr. Whitaker's, and telling that gentleman what he had done, left the bottle with him.

Twenty-four hours later, Dr. Whitaker handed a sealed letter to Pod, with instructions to give the same privately into the hands of Mr. Kelvin at the first possible opportunity. That opportunity came next morning, when Miss Deane left the room for a few minutes while her cousin was dictating his letters to Pod. The moment the door was shut behind her, Pod, who had been on the watch, passed the letter into the hands of Mr. Kelvin. "You must read this in private, please, before Miss Deane comes back into the room."

Kelvin looked at the lad, but broke the seal without comment. Then, glancing at the signature, "From Whitaker!" he said.

“ What on earth can he have to write to me about ? ”

Dr. Whitaker’s letter ran as under—

“ MY DEAR KELVIN,—

I need not tell you that I have been truly grieved to hear of your long illness, as I do not doubt that you would be grieved were I in the same unfortunate predicament. As your clerk, young Piper, is frequently employed by me of an evening in making out my accounts, I have been enabled to question him pretty closely as to the progress and symptoms of your complaint. As a professional man, such details are never without interest for me, more especially where one of my friends is concerned. Certain things which Piper has told me of late (in answer to my questioning) have set me thinking very seriously.

“ I have a certain delicacy in writing to you as I am writing now. Druce and I, as you are well aware, are by no means the best of friends. He looks upon me as a juvenile who has hardly learnt the A B C

of his profession — as a believer in new-fangled notions such as the world had never heard of when he was young ; and, finally, he holds me in most general contempt. He is quite welcome to his opinion of me. I may have mine about him, only I keep it to myself. In such a state of affairs, for me to interfere, either verbally or by writing, with one of his patients, is a professional crime for which nothing less than hanging, drawing, and quartering ought to be punishment sufficient. Indeed, I may tell you, that unless the occasion had seemed to me a very serious one indeed, no such interference on my part would have taken place. But were I to go to Dr. Druce and tell him what I have reason to think about your case, how should I be received ?

“ As it happens, there is no need to answer this question. I am not going to Druce. I am going to put him aside, and, breaking through all the rules of professional etiquette, to communicate with you direct.

“ My dear Kelvin, I have heard enough

from Piper about your case both to puzzle and alarm me. Yours is certainly no ordinary liver complaint. I may tell you that much at once. What else it may be, I am hardly prepared as yet to say—or even to hint. But if you have any regard for my words, or any belief in my knowledge, you will do what I ask of you, and do it without hesitation or delay.

“ What I want you to do is this : To send to me by Piper, in a bottle sealed by your own hand, about half a pint of whatever liquid may be brought you to drink after you have read this letter—it matters little whether it be tea, barley-water, toast-and-water, or anything else. Do this unknown to anyone but Piper, who will at once bring me the bottle and contents. Whisper no word to anyone as to what you have done, and ask Piper no questions. He may be trusted implicitly, but of the details he knows nothing. Till you hear from me again, which will probably be to-morrow evening, take as little liquid as possible, and eat nothing but plain biscuits and dry

toast. A little weak brandy-and-water will do you no harm, but either mix it yourself or see it mixed. Be sure that I am not asking you to do all this without a reason, and a very powerful one too. Above all things—*silence and secrecy*. Burn this as soon as read, and believe me,

“Your sincere friend,

“CYRUS WHITAKER.”

“Burn this letter,” said Kelvin to Pod, when he had read it through twice. When he had seen it shrivelled into ashes, he lay back on his pillows, thinking, and neither stirred nor spoke till Miss Deane came into the room, some quarter of an hour afterwards.

“Olive,” he said, but without turning his eyes towards her, “I feel more thirsty than usual this morning. If you have any barley-water ready-made, I should like you to get me some.”

She smiled, and went without a word. Five minutes later, she came back with a small jug and a glass.

“Will you take a little of it now?” she asked.

“Yes, just a little, and then you can put the things on the table within reach.” After she had given him a little of the barley-water, he said, “Piper and I have rather a heavy lot of papers to wade through this morning, so, while we are finishing them, I wish you would just step round to the library and get me that book of travels we were talking about last night; or if that one is not at home, some other: you know the sort I like.”

As soon as Olive had left the room, Kelvin turned to Pod. “You have got a bottle in your pocket, I suppose?” he said.

“Yes, sir.”

“Then pour that barley-water into it, and cork it up tightly.”

When this was done, Pod lighted a taper, and Kelvin sealed up the bottle with his own trembling fingers, and stamped it with the monogram of his ring. Then the bottle went back into Pod’s pocket.

“No more business to-day,” said the sick

man, wearily. "Take those papers back to Mr. Bray, and tell him to do the best he can with them. As for yourself, you will go at once to Dr. Whitaker, and give that bottle into his own hands. I suppose I may rely upon your fidelity and discretion in this matter, eh ?"

"You may do that, sir, with perfect confidence," said Pod, with much earnestness.

"Yes, I think you are true and honest," said Kelvin, slowly, with his eyes fixed full on the boy's open face. Then, as Pod went out, he added to himself: "That letter of Whitaker's has instilled such a horrible suspicion into my mind, that I no longer know whom or what to believe."

Next morning, Pod smuggled another letter into the hands of his master. It was very brief, but very much to the purpose.

"MY DEAR KELVIN,

"I must see you as quickly as possible, and in *private*. Your restoration to

health, nay, your life itself, may depend on this. *No one* must know of my visit except Piper ; and you must let me know through him when you can arrange to have me admitted to your room without any of your household being aware of my visit. Not a word to anyone. Burn this.

“ Yours ever,

“ C. W.”

For fully half an hour Matthew Kelvin remained buried in thought after reading this letter. Then he said to Pod :

“ Instead of Mr. Bray signing the letters this afternoon, you will bring them upstairs to be signed by me.” At five o’clock, up came Pod with the letters. Kelvin was sitting up in his easy-chair by this time, and it struck Pod that he looked brighter and better than he had seen him look for some time past. When the letters were signed, and Pod was about to go, Kelvin put into his hand a sealed envelope. “ Give this to Dr. Whitaker, and be sure that he has it to-night.”

Inside the envelope was a scrap of paper, on which were written these words :

“To-morrow morning at half-past eleven.

“M. K.”



CHAPTER III.

VAN DUREN'S DREAM.

MAX VAN DUREN'S stay on the Continent, instead of lasting for four or five days only, extended itself to a fortnight. During the whole of that time, Jonas Pringle remained in charge of the premises in Spur Alley. At any other time, the sudden departure of Byrne and his daughter, taken in conjunction with what else Pringle either knew or suspected, would have formed food sufficient for many an hour's restless pondering, it being a matter of principle with Pringle to suspect everybody and

everything. But at present his own affairs were quite enough to occupy his thoughts. He had been waiting patiently, week after week, for an occasion to arise which should call Van Duren from home, and so give him an opportunity of bringing to a climax a certain hidden scheme at which he had been patiently working for upwards of a year. The wished-for opportunity was now here, but the advantage he had intended to derive from it seemed as utterly beyond his reach as before. In other words, the key at which he had laboured so long and so patiently, and which, he had fondly hoped, needed but a few more touches of the file to bring it to perfection, still refused—obstinately and maliciously refused—to open the lock of Van Duren's safe. And rarely could there have been a more opportune time to open it than the present. There were notes and gold in it to the amount of two thousand pounds, as Pringle knew full well. If he could only have obtained possession of these notes and this gold within a few hours of Van Duren's

departure for Paris, he would have had time to change the notes and get three or four days' clear start before the faintest suspicion that there was anything wrong could have got abroad. It was for this that he had been biding his time so long; it was for this that he had put up with Van Duren's hard words and starvation salary. He had promised himself all along that he would have a day of glorious revenge; that at one bold sweep he would make himself master of enough, if judiciously invested, to secure for himself a comfortable little income for life. But all his delicate manipulation with the file, all his added touches, had hitherto proved ineffective and of no avail. The wards of the lock that held the iron door stubbornly refused to be coaxed; the Open Sesame was not yet found. Pringle was terribly chagrined. Still he never allowed himself to altogether despair. He felt that success was only a matter of time; but he would not have cared for success to come at a moment when there might chance to be

little or nothing to reward his labours : he was anxious that it should come now, when the reward would be great. But Van Duren could not stay away for ever, and one afternoon brought the long-expected telegram, announcing that he might be looked for in Spur Alley before bed-time next night.

“ Curse him for coming back so soon !” said Pringle to himself, as he tore the telegram to shreds. “ If he had only stayed away another day or two, I should have got my key to fit and open the lock. It may be months before he goes out of town again. It may be months before there’s as much money in the safe again as there is now. But it’s just like my luck !”

Mr. Van Duren reached home about ten o’clock next evening. Pringle was there to receive him, and while Mrs. Bakewell was getting supper ready, the two men went into the discussion of sundry business details. But not more than ten minutes had passed before Van Duren, changing the subject, suddenly said : “ By-

the-by, I have not made any inquiry after my lodgers. How is Mr. Byrne?—Better, I hope. And Miss Byrne, is she quite well?"

There was a deep longing in his heart to see Miriam again. She had promised to give him a definite yes or no immediately after his return, and he flattered himself that if he read the signs aright, he had little or nothing to fear. He had brought back with him several expensive presents for her. Never in his life before had he bought presents for anybody, his natural instincts being those of a miser; and it was not without a sharp pang that he had brought himself, even in the present instance, to part from his dearly-loved money. These presents had been in his thoughts all the way coming home. He would spread them out before Miriam, and watch her unfold them from their wrappers one by one; and in imagination he saw the sparkle in her eyes and the smile on her lips as she clasped the bracelet on her wrist, or posed before the glass while trying the effect

of her new ear-rings. Then, before the freshness and surprise had time to evaporate, he would take her hand and press it passionately to his lips, and implore her to give him her answer once for all. If she condescended to accept his presents, how could he doubt what that answer would be ? They would be married before summer was over ; and when once Miriam was his wife, he would know how to bend her will to his—know how to teach her what was best for her comfort and his—from his own point of view.

His first look from the cab, when he got in sight of the house, had been to the windows of his lodgers' sitting-room. But all was dark there, and his heart had chilled a little at the sight. It was almost too early for them to have gone to bed : probably they had gone out somewhere to spend the evening. He had secretly flattered himself that Miriam would be there to welcome him—that the least she could do would be to open the door of her sitting-room, ready to greet him with a smile and a pressure of

the hand as he went upstairs to his own part of the house. But no Miriam was there to-night, evidently; and then the thought struck him that perhaps no one had told her of his expected return. This thought was not without its consolation; so, hiding his impatience under his usual impassive demeanour, he went indoors as if nothing were amiss, and not till he and Pringle had been talking together for ten minutes did he seem to recollect the existence of any such persons as Mr. Byrne and his daughter.

Pringle had been expecting the question for some time, and was ready with his answer.

“Mr. Byrne and Miss Byrne went away together in a cab two or three days after you left home.”

“Went away together in cab!” cried Van Duren. “But at least they left word where they were going, and when they might be expected back?”

“Miss Byrne said they were going to the seaside for the benefit of the old

gentleman's health ; but there was nothing said about when they might be expected back."

"Strange — very strange !" muttered Van Duren. Some presage of coming evil seemed to touch him already. He looked from side to side of the ill-lighted room, and shuddered. Pringle was watching him narrowly.

"Did they take much luggage with them ?" he asked.

"I heard Mrs. Bakewell say that there was nothing left in their rooms but the bare furniture."

"Have any letters been received here for them since they left ?"

"Not one, sir."

"How was it you did not send me word, either by telegram or letter, when you discovered that they were going away ?"

"Because I was under the impression that they had told you, before you went out of town, that they were going away."

This was not true, but it was necessary that Pringle should excuse himself somehow.

“But did nobody ask them when they might be expected back?”

“Yes; Mrs. Bakewell did. Miss Byrne’s answer was that everything depended on the state of the old gentleman’s health, and that they might be away only a week, or they might be away a month.”

“I would give twenty pounds this very minute to know where they are gone to!” cried Van Duren, emphatically, as he pushed away his chair, and began to pace the room with restless strides.

Pringle sat watching him for a minute or two. That Van Duren was terribly chagrined, he could see plainly enough, and it pleased him to see it. The question with him now was, should he, or should he not tell Van Duren that he knew to what place his lodgers were gone? On the one hand, to keep Van Duren in ignorance of what he, Pringle, knew, would be a source of great gratification to him. But, on the other hand, if he were to reveal what he knew, was there not a faint probability that Van Duren might go in search of them—

might leave him alone in the house for a few days longer, and so afford him another opportunity of making himself master of the treasure in the iron safe ? This latter thought decided him.

“I can tell you where Mr. and Miss Byrne are gone to, sir,” he said, speaking very quietly, “and I won’t charge you twenty pounds for the information, either.”

“Where are they gone ?” asked Van Duren, abruptly, as he brought his walk to a sudden stand.

“Their luggage was labelled for Marhyddoc, in North Wales.”

Jonas Pringle certainly never anticipated the effect which his words would have on Max Van Duren. The latter seemed like a man suddenly turned to stone. All the colour fled from his face, his lips turned blue, while into his eyes there came an expression of unspeakable terror. For a few minutes he stood like a man who neither knew where he was nor what he was doing, who had no thought for anything in the

wide world but the terrible news he had just heard. Then he put out a hand, and seemed to be feeling for a chair, without knowing what he was about. Pringle took his arm and guided him to a seat.

“A sudden spasm—nothing more,” he said. “I shall be better presently.”

“Shall I get you a glass of water?” asked Pringle.

Van Duren shook his head. “I have been taken like this once or twice lately,” he stammered. “I must talk to my doctor about it.”

Mrs. Bakewell came in to lay the cloth for supper. This seemed to rouse him. “I shall not want any supper; I’ve changed my mind. You need not bring it in,” he said. Then turning to Pringle, “To what place did you say that Mr. Byrne and his daughter were gone?” he asked.

“To Marhyddoc, in North Wales,”

“Some little fishing or bathing place, I suppose—quiet and salubrious, suitable for an old man like Mr. Byrne. Strange, though, that they never told me they were

going. You don't know, Pringle, do you, what their particular reason might be for choosing Marhyddoc, out of all places in the world?"

"I don't know that, sir; they gave no hint on that point," said Pringle. "But I know this for a fact, that old Mr. Byrne was no more deaf than you or me, sir; that his long white hair was nothing but a wig, and his hump nothing but a sham; and that when he liked he could be as active on his feet as any gentleman of fifty or fifty-five can be."

Max Van Duren sat and stared at his clerk like a man thoroughly stupefied. "How do you know all this?" he said, speaking in a low, hoarse voice.

"Because I've seen it with my own eyes," answered Pringle. Then he told him all about the Euston Square episode.

"But what possible object could Mr. Byrne have in disguising himself in the way you mention? and what could be his motive in trying to deceive me?"

"Don't know, sir, I'm sure. But mightn't

it all be a plant—a try-on—to get something out of you, either money or information, or something else?"

"They got no money out of me—not a single penny," answered Van Duren. "And as for information——"

In a moment it flashed across his mind that Miriam Byrne had indeed got certain information out of him, which information seemed to connect itself, in some mysterious way, with the journey to Wales. Would she and her father ever have gone to any such out-of-the-way place as Marhyddoc, if he had not told Miriam the story of the shipwreck? But even in that case, what possible object could be gained by their visit to Marhyddoc? The key to the great secret of his life lay there at the bottom of the sea, as far beyond their reach, even supposing them to have known of its existence, as it was beyond his. After all, it was perhaps nothing more than a singular coincidence that had taken them to that particular spot in Wales. Could it be that Miriam had grown to take so deep an in-

terest in him that she wanted to see the very place where he had been shipwrecked ? This was a thought that made his heart beat wildly for a moment or two ; but it was quickly succeeded by a feeling of deadly apprehension. What Pringle had told him about Byrne and his disguise, smote him with a sense of some hidden danger which he could not overcome. Why had Miriam pressed him so earnestly to give her all the details of the shipwreck ? And why had they said nothing to him of their contemplated journey before he left home ?

He could not shake off the feeling that he was in the midst of some great peril. It was quite out of the question that he should sit quietly down in Spur Alley, and have no knowledge of what was happening in Wales. Even at that moment, what terrible events might be taking place on which his fate might hang as on a thread ! And yet again, how was it possible that any harm could happen to him having its origin in what he had told Miriam ? He had simply told her that he had lost a box con-

taining the whole of his worldly possessions; but he had given no hint as to the special contents of the box. How was she or her father to connect the Max Van Duren of to-day with the Max Jacoby of twenty years ago? And even granting that they knew his secret so far, there would not, even in that case, be the slightest link to connect him with the murder of Paul Stilling. But more than all else was he rendered uneasy by the fact of Byrne's disguise. There was something in that which he altogether failed to comprehend. He questioned Pringle again and again as to what he had seen at Euston Square, but with no other result than to add a more positive confirmation to what he had been told at first.

“Pringle, I shall go down to Marhyddoc by the next fast train.”

“There is one at ten in the morning, sir.”

“That will suit me. Mr. Byrne and I have sundry business transactions together which necessitate my seeing him as soon

as possible. I need not tell you how annoyed I am to find that he has gone away without leaving a message of any kind for me."

He paused and looked at his watch. "I am terribly tired, and I must try to get a few hours' sleep before starting. You are a light sleeper, I know, and I will trust you to call me at six."

"All right, sir."

"You may also see Mrs. Bakewell for me, and arrange for breakfast at eight. You had better sleep here to-night, and I will go through the remaining letters with you during breakfast."

Then, without another word, he left the room and marched slowly upstairs to bed. Van Duren had spoken no more than the truth when he said that he was terribly tired. He had been travelling continuously for eighteen hours, and was thoroughly worn out. The news told him by Pringle had taken away whatever appetite he might otherwise have had, while leaving the need of some refreshment strongly upon him.

He was never without cognac in his bedroom. Of this he now took a powerful dose, and then flinging himself upon the bed, dressed as he was, in three minutes he was fast aleep.

While sleeping thus, he had a dream—a dream more strangely vivid, more realistic in all its details, than any that he had ever had before.

In this dream he himself was as it were an impersonal being, the spectator of a drama in which he was called upon to play no part. The scene of the drama in question was the bottom of the sea. Through the green and limpid twilight, the floor, covered with sand and shells, and huge, smooth-washed boulders, could be seen stretching away on every side till lost in the dim distance. Fishes of various kinds, some such as are never seen by mortal eye, swam silently to and fro in the liquid depths. The middle distance of the sea was filled up with a huge mass of wreckage and broken timber. There was no need to tell the dreamer of what good ship the

wreck was now before him. Even in his sleep, his lips murmured, "That is the *Albatross*." In and out of the broken bulks, and rotting portholes, and shattered hatchways, strange monsters of the sea, big and little, kept crawling continually.

But presently there was a quick, frightened movement among the fishes, and the dreamer beheld descending slowly from unknown heights a ladder made of stout rope and weighted heavily at the bottom. In a little while the weights touched the ground, and the ladder became stationary and firm. Soon there could be seen, coming down slowly and heedfully, a man in the full costume of a diver, and looking in it no unfit companion for the strange creatures whose haunts he had for a little while invaded. In a few minutes he was joined by another man similarly attired. Together the two men bent their steps towards the wreck. There was no need to tell the dreamer what they were there to look for. Would they find it, or would they not? But in his impersonality he had no further

interest in having this question answered than a spectator at a play might have; indeed, so slightly was he interested, that he laughed aloud more than once as he watched the strange, awkward movements of the two men as they clambered around and about the wreck.

Round and about, in and out, they moved without any apparent success. Evidently, the object they had come in search of was not to be found. At length, as if by mutual consent, they walked back to the ladder. One of them had got his foot on the lower-most rung, when his mate touched him on the shoulder and pointed back to the wreck. The sleeper's eyes followed the direction of the man's finger, and saw there—what? The spectral figure of a man standing on the broken bulwarks of the ship, and pointing downwards with outstretched finger to a heap of rotting timber and loose wreckage at its feet. The figure was diaphanous; the broken stump of a mast in front of which it was standing could be clearly seen through it. It seemed to have

a wavering motion, very slight, but still perceptible, like that of a flame which quivers by the intensity of its own heat. Although its finger pointed downwards, the face of the figure was bent full on the face of the sleeping man—the same face that he had seen in the glass, haggard, deathlike, with a thin line of black moustache ; while its black, inscrutable eyes gazed down through his eyes into his very soul. There was no laughter, no cynicism left in the dreamer now—nothing but an unspeakable horror that stirred his hair and chilled the beating of his heart even while he slept. He could not turn away his eyes from those other eyes that were staring into his ; but for all that he could see, as we do see in dreams, everything that was going on around him. He could see the men moving slowly back towards the wreck, in obedience to the invitation of the spectre, of whom they seemed to have no dread. He could see them searching and turning over the heap of mouldering débris at which the finger was so persistently

pointed, and presently he could see them drag from the midst of it a small square oaken box, the silver clamps of which were all tarnished and black with the action of the sea. How well he remembered that box ! what cause he had to remember it !

Carrying the box carefully for fear lest it should fall to pieces, one of the men brought it presently to the foot of the ladder, close to which, let down from the heights above, hung a cord with a hook at the end of it. To this hook the box was now fastened by one of the men, then a tug was given to the cord, and next moment the box began slowly to ascend, drawn up by unseen hands above.

The finger of the spectre now pointed upward. Soon the box was lost to view, and as it disappeared, the twilight of the scene seemed to darken and deepen, and the water to lose somewhat of its limpid clearness. It was as though night were reaching down with its hand of blackness to the bottom of the sea. Slowly but surely the whole scene grew blurred and indistinct

as though one filmy veil of darkness after another were being drawn between it and the dreamer's eyes, till at length the familiar walls of the dreamer's bedroom began to grow out of the darkness, and Max Van Duren knew that he was awake, and that the dawn of another day was beginning to broaden in the east. From head to foot he was bathed in perspiration, and he was trembling in every limb. He sat up on the bed and gazed timidly around, as half expecting to see the eyes of the spectre staring at him from some dim corner of the room ; but presently he heard a welcome footstep on the stairs outside, and then came the voice of Pringle, telling him that it was time to get up.



CHAPTER IV.

PRINGLE'S DISCOVERY.

CREAT was the glee of Jonas Pringle when he found himself left alone once more in Spur Alley. When he saw Van Duren off in a cab for Euston Square he mentally bade him good-bye for ever.

So elated was he, so sure did he now feel that the moment of success was at hand, that he went out and bought a tin of preserved lobster, and a bottle of rum, and there and then held high festival with Bakewell and his wife in their dungeon below stairs. He calculated that, at the

very soonest, Van Duren need not be expected back for three or four days ; and what might not be accomplished even in that short time ! He could not labour much during the day at perfecting his duplicate key ; he had too many interruptions ; he was wanted too frequently in the office by people who called to inquire after Van Duren. But after business hours, when the hush of evening crept over the busy city, then he could work away as long as he liked without fear of interruption. And surely, after all that had gone before, a few short hours only would now be needed to place the long-coveted prize in his grasp.

All that day he remained very restless and unsettled, and seemed unable either to stay long in any one place, or to fix his mind on anything for more than a few minutes at a time.

Van Duren had left him several important letters to write, but after getting as far as the date and "Dear Sir," or "Gentlemen," with one or other of them,

his ideas became so mixed up and confused that he could no longer disentangle the subject of one letter from that of another in his thoughts ; so that at last he had to fling down his pen in disgust, and rush off for a quarter of an hour to a favourite haunt round the corner. Indeed, he seemed to be running in and out all day long.

Pringle made up his mind that, if requisite, he would work away at his key all night. When Bakewell and his wife were safe in bed—and they rarely sat up after ten o'clock—he would steal down-stairs without his shoes, turn on the gas, and shut himself up in the strong room ; and there, file in hand, and a fresh bottle of rum by his side, he could work on in safety till five or six o'clock next morning. But perhaps before that time the stubborn lock would yield and the great door fall back on its hinges, and then !— But such a possibility was almost too much for calm consideration.

Before beginning his work for the night,

he would go down to a little water-side tavern that he knew of, where the *Shipping Gazette* could always be found, together with sundry lists of vessels about to sail from London and other ports. He had not yet decided on the spot to which he should direct his flight, but he could make up his mind on that important point to-night, and pick out the names and dates of sailing of some half-dozen ships, so as to be ready for starting at any minute.

As it happened, however, the evening turned out so wet and stormy that Pringle was obliged to put off his proposed visit to the river-side tavern till another day. This altered his plans a little. Instead of waiting till Bakewell and his wife were in bed, as soon as he had shut the office and hurriedly swallowed a cup of tea, he went to his own room and locked himself in, and set to work at once with his file. But he was afraid to go on working too long at a time without trying the key in the lock. At any moment his file might give the one

last touch, which, Pringle felt convinced, was all that his key now needed to make him at once master of the situation. So, at intervals of half an hour or so, he stole downstairs to the strong room to try his key once more ; and once more, on finding that the master-touch had not yet been given, he stole back to his own room and set to work again with a slow, quiet patience that would not know what it was to feel itself beaten.

To-night, for a wonder, it was nearly eleven before the Bakewells went to bed. As soon as he felt sure that there was no longer anything to fear from them, Pringle removed himself permanently downstairs for the night. Seating himself on a pile of books close by the iron door, he went quietly on with his work. At half-past eleven he tried the key in the lock, but, for aught he could tell to the contrary, he might have been no nearer success than he had been a month previously. He tried again as the clocks were chiming the quarter before midnight, and the wards of

the lock yielded and fell back as readily and smoothly as ever they had done before Van Duren's own key. The master touch had been given at last.

Pringle, sitting on his heap of books, stared at the open door as though he could not believe the evidence of his senses. Was it, could it be possible that the golden prize for which he had laboured so long and so patiently was at last really within his grasp ? His hands were all a-tremble, his head was burning, his mouth parched up. All at once it struck him that he felt very thirsty, and that it was close upon twelve o'clock. There would be time for one, or even for two last tumblers before the taverns closed. Where would he be before midnight should strike again ? Not in London, he said to himself, but miles out at sea on his way to some far-off land.

With some such thoughts as these flitting fitfully through his mind, he mechanically lowered the gas, and then, leaving the safe-door still open, but closing and locking the door of the room, he crept cautiously up

the stone staircase, with his shoes in his hand, and let himself out at the front door with as little noise as possible. He had made no attempt to examine the contents of the safe. A brief glance into it had satisfied him for the time being. He knew for an undoubted fact that the money he coveted was there, and he asked to know nothing more. There was no fear that it would take to itself wings while he went to have a final glass at his favourite tavern.

The final glass was duly imbibed, and at five minutes past twelve Jonas Pringle found himself in the streets again, and on his way back to Spur Alley. He was nearly at home, when suddenly his eyes fell on the figure of a woman who was standing full in the light of a street lamp, and apparently counting some money. There was something in the outline or attitude of the woman that sent a strange thrill to his heart. With a half-inarticulate cry, he hurried forward. Startled by his sudden movement, the woman looked up, and her

haggard face became clearly visible in the lamplight.

“Jessie!—my daughter!” exclaimed Pringle, and he sprang forward as though he would clutch her.

“Father!” cried the woman, in a voice of shrill, sharp agony, as she suddenly flung up her arms. Then, before he could touch her, she turned and fled.

“Jessie! Jessie! Don’t run away from me!” cried Pringle, as he hurried after her.

But he was no match for the fleet-footed woman in front of him. By the time he got to the corner of the street he was completely exhausted, and Jessie was already out of sight. He leaned for a moment or two against the wall, with a hand pressed to his side, while he gathered breath. Then, with a bitter sigh, he retraced his way slowly towards Spur Alley.

“Found at last,” he muttered to himself, as he stumbled painfully along—“found at last, but only to lose her again at the moment of finding! I would have forgiven

everything—yes, everything, if she would only have come back to me!"

During the last few minutes, he had forgotten all about the safe and its contents, and the treasure that lay ready to his hand; but now, as he proceeded to open the street door with his latch-key, the whole situation came back to his mind in a rush, but with a sense of strangeness as though it were something done by some other man, or by himself long years before.

The house was as dark and silent as a tomb. He groped his way downstairs, and presently he found himself in the strong-room again. He sat down on the heap of books to think. To-night, of all nights in his life, he had seen again the daughter for whom he had been searching for years. He had seen her one moment, but only to lose her the next. She had fled from him, desperately determined to avoid him; and the chances were that, in that great wilderness of London, they should never meet again. His heart yearned towards her as it had never yearned before, but all her desire

seemed to be to shun him. The question with him now was, whether he should take this money which lay ready to his hand, and go away for ever; or whether he should relock the safe, leaving the money untouched, and go on living his old life as if this dream of sudden wealth had never haunted his mind, and devote all his spare hours, as he had done, years before, to searching for his lost child, who, as to-night had proved, was so near to him and yet so far away. The chances were that he should never see Jessie again; and even if he should succeed in finding her, he had no proof that she would not elude him again as she had done already. If only he could have felt sure of finding her, and that she would stay with him when found, not ten times the amount of money in Van Duren's safe would have tempted him to leave London, and with it his last chance of ever seeing her again.

His thoughts were all in a maze of confusion. He could not make up his mind what to do. Springing to his feet, he flung

wide the door of the safe. He would at least feast his eyes on this treasure for which he had braved so much and laboured so long. There would still be time to decide afterwards what he should finally do.

There were several iron drawers in the safe, all of them unlocked. These he opened one after another. One of them was full of small bags of specie, each of which was neatly tied up and labelled, to show the value of its contents. Another drawer contained bank-notes, drafts, and bills of exchange. Other receptacles held promissory notes, bills of sale, and various documents having a bearing on Van Duren's business. Pringle paused for a moment or two while he made a rapid calculation. In gold and notes alone, the safe held upwards of three thousand pounds. His most sanguine hopes were more than realized. Should he take this money and go, or should he not ? At six o'clock that very morning he could drop down the river in an outward-bound ship, and all trace of him would be lost for ever. But to leave Jessie !

There was one last drawer still to open. He drew it slowly out. It held neither gold, nor notes, nor bills of exchange. There was nothing in it but a small cedar-wood box, which box was locked. Pringle took it out of the drawer. It was very light, and not at all strong. What could there be inside it? Why should the contents of this box be held as of more account than the gold [and notes that lay openly about? Perhaps within that little casket lay hidden some dark secret of Van Duren's life. With the aid of one of his files, which lay there on the floor, Pringle could force open the lid in a couple of minutes, and see with his own eyes what was shut up inside. No sooner thought than done—done without pausing to ask himself whether such an act would not shut him out from all possibility of retreat. So long as the box remained intact, so long as the gold and notes remained untouched, all that he had to do was to shut and relock the door of the safe, and Van Duren need never know anything of what had happened to-night.

But the lid of the box was forced even while this thought was floating vaguely through his mind. He forced it, breaking it into two pieces as he did so. To his intense disappointment, there was nothing inside but a parcel of old letters.

Yes, at the very bottom there was something more, and yet nothing of any great consequence : only a woman's portrait. He took it up with a sneer, and moved a few steps nearer the gaslight, so as to be able to examine it more closely.

For a full minute he stood staring at the portrait without moving a muscle, with no more apparent life in him than a waxen effigy. Then he let the portrait drop as suddenly as though it had burnt him, and putting his hands to his face, he sank on his knees beside it on the floor. But not long did he remain thus. With a low cry, he started to his feet as though suddenly struck by some overwhelming thought, and hurrying across the floor, he pulled out the drawer that held the letters, and went back with it to the light. Holding the drawer

under one arm, he picked out a letter here and there, opened it, read a line or two, glanced at the signature, and then put it back and took up another. Last of all, he picked up the portrait, kissed it, laid it atop of the letters, and put the drawer back into its place in the safe. Then once more he sat down to think.

What a strange and terrible discovery was that which he had just made! The likeness was Jessie's likeness, and the letters were Jessie's letters. Max Van Duren was the villain who had robbed him of his child.

Nineteen men out of twenty would have destroyed the letters of a girl for whom they had ceased to care, and whom they had cast upon the world without compunction, to starve, or die, or to live on in a way that was worse than death. But here the letters were. They had been written in the days when this man called Jessie his "wild rose," when she believed him to be everything that was good and honourable; when, at his persuasion, and for love of him, she ran away from the drunken, disreputable

father who seemed to value her so little, but who found out how dear the motherless girl was to his heart when he had lost her for ever. Yes ; here were the letters, overflowing with sweet, girlish confidence and outspoken love. Who could tell why Van Duren had kept them ? Not he himself, if any one had put the question to him.

Jonas Pringle had need to think. He heard the City clocks strike one, as he sat on the pile of ledgers by the open door of the safe, his elbows on his knees, his face buried in his hands. He heard the City clocks strike two, and still he sat like a man turned to stone.

When, years before, he had first come to London, and had reason to believe that his daughter was hidden somewhere in the same huge wilderness, all his spare time for many weary months had been devoted to looking for her. But that could not go on for ever : and although he had long ago given up all active search for Jessie, the trick, acquired at that time, of peering up into the face of every woman who passed

him in the streets, had never wholly left him. Thousands of times had he dwelt in imagination on the meeting which, he felt convinced, must one day take place between his daughter and himself—how he would snatch her to his heart and tell her that all the past was dead and forgiven. And now he had seen her, but only to find that she shunned him as though he were stricken with the plague. A thousand times had he sworn to himself that should he ever knowingly cross the path of the man who had destroyed his child, no power in heaven or on earth should baulk him of his revenge. And now that by a strange chance he had crossed the path of that man, should his oaths be all forgotten, and the revenge he had promised himself nothing but an empty dream? Not so, not so.

But what form should his vengeance take? Not the poor, paltry, insignificant form of robbing this man of his gold. After what he had learned to-night, rather than take a penny of his money, he would have begged from door to door. What he wanted

was not Van Duren's money, but Van Duren's life. He would like to have seen him come home the worse for wine, and in that condition have gone to bed, and then he would have set fire to the house and have burnt him as he slept. He would like to have treated him as some savage tribes treat their prisoners—torturing them hour after hour, killing them by inches through a long summer day. A death that would come quickly was too good for him. Something slow and lingering, something that would make him long for death as a prisoner longs for the order for his release, would not be one whit more than he, and all such as he, deserved.

At length he heard the clocks strike four, and he knew that the bright May dawning was beginning to flood the streets with the grey and gold of another day. Then he stood up, stiff, cold, and weary, but with an intense fire burning at his heart that seemed to light him up from head to foot, and had already transformed him into another man. He put out the gas, and

leaving the safe-door still unlocked, but locking the outer door, he crept upstairs to bed. He had matured his plan ; he had thought out his scheme of vengeance ; everything was clearly mapped out in his mind : he could now afford to take a few hours' sleep.

He came down at his usual hour, washed, shaven, and brushed more carefully than common, and had breakfast with the Bakewells. He was very chatty and affable over the meal, and entertained them with a long and elaborate narrative of the latest murder, so that they all enjoyed themselves greatly. An hour later, after the post letters had arrived, he called Bakewell into the office.

“I have just got a letter from the governor,” said Pringle, “in which he tells me that he shall not be back home for a fortnight, or even longer. So, as you and your better half will have little or nothing to do during that time, he thinks you may as well take advantage of his absence and have a run out to the seaside, or down into

the country, for a couple of weeks. And what do you think he has done ? He has opened his heart as I never knew him to open it before, and has actually asked me to give you five pounds towards paying your expenses while you are away. Bakewell, what a lucky dog you are !”

Bakewell was staggered by the news of his good fortune, as Pringle had perhaps intended that he should be : nor was his wife less overcome when told of it. However, they were nothing loth to go for a holiday on such terms ; and so well did Pringle work upon them, and hurry forward their arrangements, that at six o'clock that evening he had the satisfaction of seeing them drive away to the station, and of finding himself left the sole inmate of the big, gloomy house in Spur Alley.

This was what he wanted. He wanted to wait there, all alone, for the return of Van Duren. He went about his business as at ordinary times, but he hardly tasted drink at all. Neither did he sleep much. Of an evening he would sit all alone in Mrs.

Bakewell's underground kitchen, smoking a long clay pipe, moistening his mouth now and then with a little cold tea, and now and then smashing a stray beetle. He would sit thus, his feet perched on the chimney-piece, listening to the clocks as they struck hour after hour, thinking his own dark thoughts, and waiting for the coming of Max Van Duren.



CHAPTER V.

A FOUND LETTER.

IT was evening—the evening of the day on which Matthew Kelvin had sent his brief note to Dr. Whitaker, making an appointment with him for half-past eleven next morning. He had desired to be left alone for an hour, and during that time he had contrived, with several intervals of rest, for his weakness was very great, to write a longer letter than had come from his pen since the first day of his illness. This letter, duly sealed and directed, now lay on the little table by his bedside. The address

on it was very short, being simply—"Miss Lloyd, Stammars."

By-and-by Mrs. Kelvin came into the room. As she did so, her son quietly thrust the letter under his pillow. The old lady came to the bedside, and beamed on him through her spectacles, as he lay there with his arms crossed under his head. "Why, Matthew, my dear boy, I have not seen you look so bright and well for many a long day as you have looked during the last few hours! You have got the turn at last. I feel sure you have. I knew that Dr. Druce would bring you round again after a time."

"Yes, mother, I think I have got the turn at last, as you say," answered Kelvin, gravely. "We will never let any one say a word against Dr. Druce again, will we?"

"Ah, he's very, very clever," said the old lady. Then she stooped and kissed him, and as she did so, Matthew's arm stole round her neck, and pressed her head gently on his shoulder, and kept it there some

minutes. When he let her go, she saw that there were tears in his eyes ; but she was too wise to notice them, and she began at once to talk as though his recovery now were merely the question of a few days, or a week at the most.

“But I shall not let you go back to business till you are quite strong,” she said. “Don’t tell me that your not doing so will cost you a great deal of money. I don’t care if it costs a thousand pounds : what is that in comparison with your health ? You must have a month at the seaside, at some cheerful place—Boulogne or Dieppe, where you won’t have time to grow melancholy. And if Olive and I go with you, we shall not bore you overmuch with our society, but only be there to see that you take proper care of yourself, and do not poison yourself with those French dinners, of which you are so fond.”

“I’m sure Olive deserves a holiday as much as any one,” resumed Mrs. Kelvin, a moment or two later. “What I should have done without her all this long time

that you have been ill, I'm sure I don't know. She must be very fond of you, Matthew, to have done what she has done. Now, don't you think she is fond of you?"

"Yes, I suppose she is fond of me--after a cousinly fashion," said Matthew, coldly.

"Ah, you men!" sighed the old lady. "Whatever sacrifices a woman may make for you, in your own hearts you never think they are half as much as you deserve."

At this moment there came a tap at the door, and Olive entered the room. She brought her cousin a basin of arrowroot, which he, remembering his promise to Dr. Whitaker, resolved not to touch. His eyes followed her curiously as she moved about the room. "I cannot--no, I cannot believe it!" he murmured under his breath. "There must be some damnable mistake somewhere."

"I have just been telling Matthew that I have not seen him look so well for weeks as he looks to-night," said Mrs. Kelvin to

Olive. "We shall soon have him all right again now."

Olive started, and threw a quick, suspicious glance at the sick man. He was looking at her very gravely but very kindly, as she thought. "No: he suspects nothing, or he would not look at me in that way," she said to herself. Then her black brows separated and her face broke into a smile. "I really believe he is better," she said to her aunt. "I believe he has only been shamming all this time, and now he is getting tired of it. I should not be a bit surprised to see him come down to breakfast to-morrow."

"I'd almost stake my life that Whitaker is making some strange blunder!" muttered Kelvin to himself. "However, I'll carry out his instructions, and let to-morrow prove to him how wrong he is."

Olive was anxious that he should drink his arrowroot. He just put a spoonful to his lips, and then put it aside as being too hot. "Come in again after my mother has gone," he contrived to whisper to her. Then

he lay back and shut his eyes, and presently both his mother and Olive bade him good night, and left the room.

As soon as Mrs. Kelvin was gone to her own room, Olive came quietly back. She was on the tip-toe of expectation to know what her cousin could have to say to her. He did not keep her long in doubt.

“Olive,” he said, “I have been writing a letter this evening—a letter which I want you to deliver for me to-morrow morning.”

“Very well, Matthew. You know that I am entirely at your service. To whom is the letter addressed?”

“To Eleanor Lloyd.”

“Ah!—then you have made up your mind at last to tell her everything?”

“I have made up my mind to tell her this: that I have discovered that she is not the daughter of Jacob Lloyd, and, consequently, not entitled to his property. But I have not made up my mind to tell her that I’ve known this fact for more than six

months, and have concealed it purposely from her. I cannot tell her that."

"But why do you wish me to take the letter? Why not send it through the post?"

"Because I am too weak at present to put down in writing more than the barest outline of the facts, and I want you to supplement by word of mouth what my letter fails to convey."

"Why not wait till you are a little stronger—till you can tell her, in person, all that it is necessary she should be told?"

"Not one day longer will I wait. Eleanor Lloyd shall know the great secret of her life before she is twenty-four hours older."

"As you will. Perhaps you are right," said Olive, quietly. "There is no reason why Miss Lloyd should be kept in ignorance any longer."

"None whatever. I don't remember anything in my life that I have regretted so bitterly as not having told Eleanor at first. But it is useless to speak of the past. The future is all we can now deal with."

“ Then your feeling of resentment towards Miss Lloyd has an existence no longer ?”

“ It is wholly dead. A sick-bed alters one’s views and feelings in many ways. How can a man have room in his heart for any petty jealousies or resentments when he sees the shades of death closing slowly round him ? To me all such feelings now seem as strange as though they were those of another man, about which I had read somewhere, and had never been a portion of my own inner life.”

Olive longed to ask him whether his love for Eleanor was dead equally with his resentment, but she was afraid that the old wound might not yet be altogether healed.

“ Then you wish me to go to Stammars to-morrow ?” she said.

“ I do. Miss Lloyd is there at present. I had a letter from Sir Thomas this morning, in which he casually mentions that fact. You had better start early—not later than ten or half-past, by which means you will get your business over by luncheon

time. Of course, you will seek a private interview with Miss Lloyd, and not say a word to either Sir Thomas or Lady Dudgeon about your errand. Eleanor must be left to break the news to them in her own way and at her own time."

"It will be a bitter task to have to do so."

"It will, indeed, poor girl! Cannot you understand, Olive, my chief reason for wanting you to go to Stammars?"

"You have told me already, have you not?"

"I have told you one reason, but not the only one. You are a woman, Olive, and I want you to break this news to Eleanor, to whom, in any case, it must come as a terrible shock. You do not like her, I know—at least, I judge so from what you have said at different times. But this is not a question of likes or dislikes. It is a question of one woman being overwhelmed by a great trouble, and of another woman smoothing away the sharp edges of that trouble with a little sympathy and kind-

ness—articles which cost so little, but, at such seasons, mean so much. This is all I ask you to do, Olive ; this is my other reason for sending you to Stammars. Am I asking more than you care to perform ?”

“ Certainly not, Matthew. It is not much that you ask me to do.”

“ But it means a great deal.”

“ How little men understand about us women !” thought Olive. “ None of my own sex, who knew the circumstances of the case, would ever have dreamed of asking me to do what Matthew has asked me to do, and believes I will do.”

“ Think what a revelation my letter will be !” continued the lawyer. “ At one fell blow she will be robbed of name, wealth, and position. Think, and pity her.”

He lay back, exhausted by the exertion of having spoken so much.

“ What can I give you ?” asked Olive. “ Will you not have your arrowroot ?”

“ No : I will take that later on. A little weak brandy-and-water is all I need at present.”

“And now I must bid you good night,” said Olive, as soon as he had revived a little.

He put the letter into her hand, and as he did so he drew her towards him and kissed her. “I should like you to start about ten in the morning,” he said. She promised to be ready by that time, and then she went.

“Whitaker’s suspicion is nothing but a horrible nightmare,” he said to himself, as Olive left the room. “He is wrong—utterly wrong.” But for all that, Matthew Kelvin hardly slept a wink all night.

Olive took the letter to her room, locked the door, and then, after deliberating for a few moments, she quietly tore open the envelope and read what was inside. “If it be requisite to deliver the letter, I can put it into another envelope, and no one will be any the wiser,” she said to herself. “If I decide not to deliver it, then another envelope will not be needed.”

“A thoroughly business-like document,” she said to herself, as she folded up the

letter, “and such as any lawyer might write to any lady. If there is no resentment in it, neither is there any love. The resentment is dead without a doubt, but is the love dead also? Query. Well, I will take the letter with me: there will be no harm in doing that: but it by no means follows that Miss Lloyd will ever read it. How easy it will be to pretend that I have lost it, and then I can tell the story my own way—with a sting in it, and before witnesses too, if such a thing be anyhow possible. Oh! to see her humiliation! that will pay for everything.”

She was up betimes next morning, and ready to start for Stammars soon after ten o’clock. In answer to her anxious inquiries, her cousin declared that he was much as usual—neither better nor worse. “You will try your best to soften the blow, won’t you, Olive?” were Matthew’s last words to her.

“ You know that I will do my best,” she said, with one of her faint smiles. She

laid her thin fingers in his hand for a moment, and then she went.

By-and-by came Dr. Whitaker. Pod succeeded in smuggling him upstairs unseen by anyone, and then took up a position in the corridor outside to keep away any would-be intruders. Mrs. Kelvin, especially, was to be kept out of the room. Were she to find out that her son was closeted with Dr. Whitaker, she would imagine at once that there was a conspiracy afoot to dispense with the services of her favourite, Dr. Druce. Fortunately, she was busy downstairs just about that time, and did not go near. Matthew had said that he fancied a certain sort of pudding—an elaborate pudding, which Mrs. Kelvin was positive that no one but herself could make properly—a pudding, as her son was quite aware, that would require her undivided attention for at least a couple of hours below stairs.

Mr. Pod Piper, keeping watch and ward outside his master's door, had a long corridor all to himself, up and down which he

could march as though he were a sentry on duty. After a time, from a door at the extreme end, there issued a pert-looking damsel, who smiled sweetly on Pod. In one hand she carried a broom, in the other a dust-pan.

“Ah, Molly, and how are you this morning?” said Pod, with the air of a duke addressing a dependent. “Blooming as ever, I see.”

“I’m quite well, Mr. Piper, and I hope you are the same,” answered Molly, with a little blush. Then she added, with a confidential air, “I’ve got such a beautiful rose downstairs. You shall have it for your button-hole, if you’ll promise to wear it.”

“I’ll wear it for your sake, Molly. But whose room is that that you have just come out of?”

“Oh, that’s Miss Deane’s room. I’ve just been tidying it up a bit while she’s out of the way.”

“You like her, of course? Everybody likes Miss Deane.”

“Then everybody’s welcome to like her.—She’s too sly for me.—But, see, I found this letter when I was sweeping just now behind her dressing-table. It must have slipped down without her knowing it. It’s been opened; but as it’s got master’s name on it, I hardly know whether to leave it where I found it or to let master have it.”

“Allow me,” said Pod, authoritatively, taking the letter from the girl’s hand. “You were quite right, Molly, to ask my advice.” As Molly had said, the letter was plainly addressed to Mr. Kelvin, and it had evidently been opened. As two-thirds of the office correspondence was seen by Pod in one form or another, and as this particular letter was not marked “Private,” he felt no compunction about opening it and reading it. It was Gerald Warburton’s first letter, in which he asked whether it was true that Jacob Lloyd had died without a will, and that he was his uncle’s heir.

Pod’s mind was made up in a moment. It seemed doubtful whether his master had ever seen the letter: in any case, he should

see it now. "You had better leave this in my hands, Molly," he said, still with his ducal air. "It is only an ordinary business letter, which has been given to Miss Deane for some purpose, and which she has evidently mislaid. You may depend upon my making it all right, and there will be no need for you to say a word about it." Then he kissed Molly and told her not to forget the rose, and then he let her go.

"Another of your little tricks, Miss Deane, or else I'm vastly mistaken," said Mr. Piper to himself. "This letter has been cut open with a pair of scissors. The governor never cut open a letter with a pair of scissors in his life. Funny, very."

Pod's watch came to an end in about an hour. He was summoned into the room, and, much to his surprise, found his master dressed and sitting in his easy-chair. How gaunt and hollow-eyed he looked! What a wreck of his former self! How loosely his clothes hung about him! Tears came into Pod's eyes as he looked at him. All Kelvin's sternness and arbitrary ways were

forgotten in pity for the plight in which he saw him now. Dr. Whitaker, with his arms folded on the table, was regarding him attentively.

“Piper,” said Mr. Kelvin, “I want you to let Dr. Whitaker out, and you must contrive it so that my mother does not see him.”

“Yes, sir.”

“After that, you will come and help me to crawl downstairs as far as my mother’s sitting-room.”

“Yes, sir.”

Dr. Whitaker rose and took his hat. “Beg pardon, sir,” said Pod to his master, “but here’s a letter which Molly the house-maid gave me just now. She found it in Miss Deane’s room while sweeping behind the dressing-table. As the letter is addressed to you, I thought I had better let you have it.”

Kelvin took the letter with hands that trembled a little, and looked first of all at the direction, and then at the mode in which the letter had been opened. Dr.

Whitaker came forward to shake hands. "Don't go for a minute or two," said Kelvin. "There is something else I want to say to you."

Dr. Whitaker sat down again, and Kelvin drew out the letter and glanced first of all at the signature. He started when he saw the name, and then he ran his eye quickly over the contents ; last of all he read the letter through, slowly and carefully.

"This is dated nearly a month ago," he said, "and yet I have never seen it till to-day. It has been kept purposely from me. By what a web of treachery and deceit am I enmeshed ! It is horrible—horrible !" He sat for a little while in silence, holding the letter in his hand, his eyes bent sadly on the floor. No one spoke.

"Whitaker," he said at last, turning abruptly on the doctor, "I want to go to Stammars."

"To Stammars ! When ?"

"Now—at once."

“ Impossible ! I would not answer for the consequences of such a mad act.”

“ Whatever the consequences may be, I must go, and at once. Piper, run to the ‘ King’s Head,’ and order a brougham to be here in ten minutes from now.” Pod was off like a shot.

“ Kelvin, you must be crazy to do this thing.”

“ Perhaps so, my friend, but still, I shall do it. During the last half-hour it seems as if the scales had fallen from my eyes. I seem now to see that woman as she really is—not as I have always believed her to be. I sent her to Stammars this morning with a message of the utmost importance. How will she deliver that message ? Not as I asked her to deliver it, but—What a fool I must have been to send her on such an errand ! I tell you, Whitaker, that I must go after her : that there is not a minute to lose.”

“ If you must go, you must, but in that case I shall go with you.”

And in that way the matter was settled.

Dr. Whitaker, finding that further opposition was useless, yielded the point, but was determined not to lose sight of Kelvin till he had seen him safely back in his own room. A quarter of an hour later the brougham came round. Kelvin managed to crawl downstairs, a step at a time, supported on each side by Whitaker and Pod. Mrs. Kelvin, being still busy with her pudding in the back part of the house, knew nothing of all this. Matthew sent her a message by Mr. Bray, his chief clerk ; but it was not to be given to her till after the brougham had started.

Then Pod climbed on to the box beside the driver, and away they went.



CHAPTER VI.

VAN DUREN IN WALES.

VN the dusk of a sweet May evening a man slipped quietly out of the back door of the “Ring of Bells” tavern—a low public-house, frequented chiefly by fishermen and labourers, in the village of Marhyddoc, and shunning the more frequented neighbourhoods, found himself presently in a pretty winding lane that seemed to lead to nowhere in particular, and was quite given over to solitude. Here the man sat down for a while on the trunk of a fallen tree. The house had become intolerable to him: he could stay in it no

longer; so he had strolled out to this quiet nook, there to wait till dusk had deepened into dark. Not without difficulty would even Jonas Pringle have recognized in this man Max Van Duren. Hands and face had been stained till they were the colour of a gipsy's, and his hair had been dyed jet black. He had only been twelve hours in Marhyddoc, but he had already found out a great deal that it behoved him to know. Fortunately for Van Duren, the landlord of the "Ring of Bells" spoke English fluently, and was very fond of airing his accomplishment, besides being naturally of a garrulous turn of mind. As a consequence, Van Duren had very soon extracted from him all that he had to tell —more than enough to confirm his worst fears.

In the portraits which the landlord drew of two of the strangers who were staying at the big hotel on the cliff, he had no difficulty in recognizing Byrne and Miriam. He could no longer doubt that he had been duped by these two; that they had only

hired his rooms, and wormed themselves into his confidence, in order to extract from him a secret which, up to that time, he could have sworn would never be whispered by him in mortal ears. And they had succeeded but too well. What a weak fool he had been ! How easily that girl had twined him round her finger ! How well he could see the sneer that would curve her beautiful lips when she spoke of him to her father ! He hated her now with as much intensity as he had loved her before. Had Miriam Byrne come walking down that lane in the May twilight — had she and Max Van Duren met face to face with no third person by, the chances that her father would ever have seen his daughter alive again would have been very problematical indeed.

But with Byrne and his daughter at the hotel was another individual, according to the landlord's account—an elderly gentleman, whom Van Duren altogether failed to recognize. Not that he was greatly troubled thereby : he had far more important matters to occupy his thoughts.

For the landlord had other news—news that he was in no wise loth to impart, that for Van Duren was full of intense significance. He knew all about the divers and their strange apparatus and dresses. He told his hearer how, in the first place, some one had come down to Marhyddoc, and, after some difficulty, had found out the exact spot where the schooner *Albatross* had foundered twenty years before. The place was then marked with a buoy, and soon after that the divers had come. Everybody in the village had asked themselves what there was in the cargo of the *Albatross* that could be worth the trouble and expense of recovery after having been for twenty years at the bottom of the sea: and for a long time the question asked by everybody had remained unanswered. But at last it had oozed out, nobody seemed to know exactly how, that the particular object for which the divers were instructed to search was a small oaken box, clamped with silver. The box was said by some to contain certain documents and title-deeds of

immense value, for lack of which the rightful heir to a great property had been kept out of his own for years. Others knew for a fact that the box was full of sovereigns which were being sent out to America to buy slaves with. Others there were who averred that inside the silver-clamped box would be found the evidence of a terrible murder that had remained undetected all this long time.

“But of course they have not succeeded in finding the box?” Van Duren had said to the landlord, burning with a terrible anxiety to know the worst.

“But they have. Yes, indeed,” said the man with a chuckle. Van Duren, on hearing this, got up abruptly and went to the window. His face was ghastly; his mouth twitched nervously in a way that he could not control; his staring eyes saw nothing that was before them. “The divers had been down three times without success,” continued the man. “They went down again very early this morning, and in less than an hour they found the box.

I saw it with my own eyes when they came ashore :—a small oak box, clamped at the corners, and with two letters on the lid.”

Van Duren tried to speak, but he was like a man under the influence of a nightmare. The words died away in his parched-up throat. Happily the landlord took his listener’s silence as a sign that his narrative was interesting, and went on without noticing him.

“When the box was brought ashore it was given into the custody of John Williams, the policeman. Yes, indeed. John took it up to the hotel on the cliff where the gentlemen are staying, and there he waited with the box on his knees till Mr. Davies of St. Owens, who is a magistrate, came, three hours later, and then they all went into a room together, the divers and the gentlemen, and the door was locked, and there the box was opened.”

Van Duren would have liked to say, “And what did they find in the box when they opened it ?” but not for the life of him could he have put the question. He knew

quite well—no one better—what would be found in the box; but none the less did he hunger to hear every detail from the landlord's lips. However, he had only to wait and say nothing; his host's natural garrulity would do the rest.

“Whether they found title-deeds in the box, or whether they found sovereigns, or whether they found anything at all, is more than I can exactly say. John Williams, the policeman, for all he's my own cousin's nephew, and I treated him to three glasses of brandy after he came down from the hotel, only shook his head and wouldn't say a word, though he knew very well that I wouldn't have whispered it to a soul. No, indeed. But John Williams will have no more of my brandy without paying for it like any other man.”

Such was the story told Max Van Duren in the little Welsh inn. His worst fears were realized. The sea had given up its secret. Everything was known. He was stunned by the blow, and seemed for the time being to have lost all power of cool

thought, all possibility of looking his position steadily in the face and of deciding as to what steps it behoved him to take next.

But even through the midst of the vague, unreasoning terror that now possessed him, through the ghastly dread that now held him as with a hand of iron, he could not help wondering by what means, through what special agencies, this unlooked for and terrible result had been brought about. Who forged the first link of evidence tending to implicate him in a crime committed so long ago that at times it almost seemed as if no such deed had ever really been done —as if it were nothing more than a distempered dream of his own imagining? What first induced Byrne and Miriam to come to his house and worm themselves into his confidence on purpose to elicit from him the particulars of the shipwreck of the *Albatross*? How did Byrne first come to connect him, Max Van Duren, with the murder of Paul Stilling? And, which was more mysterious still, whence and how did

he derive the knowledge which enabled him to connect the story of the shipwreck with that crime? Never once during all the intervening years had Van Duren troubled himself to make any inquiry after Ambrose Murray. He had never cared to ascertain whether the man he had so foully wronged were alive or dead, whether he had been pardoned and set at liberty, or whether he was still shut up in his living tomb. But now, to-day, it did occur to him to ask himself whether it was in any way possible that it was the hand of Ambrose Murray which had linked together the fatal chain of evidence—a chain that would prove strong enough to hang him unless he took particular care what he was about. But he scouted the idea almost as soon as it came to him. If Ambrose Murray were still alive, it was merely as a harmless lunatic—as a melancholy madman whom one might perhaps afford to pity, but could certainly have no cause to fear.

But it was certainly not the hand of a

harmless lunatic that was at the bottom of this plot to bring his long-hidden guilt home to him. It was the hand, rather, of a man as strong, cunning, and unscrupulous as himself—a hand that, so far, had won every point of the game against him—a hand that would succeed in tying a halter firmly round his neck, unless—unless what? he asked himself, with a mixture of terror and despair. He did not know who his enemy was, where to look for him, or how best to confront him. He had got a sort of vague notion in his mind that Byrne was merely the puppet of a firmer will and a stronger hand ; that his real enemy was lurking out of sight in the background, weaving round him, thread by thread, the meshes of a net from which in the end he would find it impossible to escape.

Not till dusk had fairly set in did Van Duren venture outside the inn door. He seemed to have lost his appetite entirely ; but he kept up his strength, and in some small way his courage also, by repeated doses of the inn's fiery spirits. When, at

last, he did leave the house, he had no settled intention in doing so. The place for hours had been full of noisy, half-drunken company, all of whom, as he could not help hearing through the thin lath-and-plaster wall that divided his room from the tap-room, were loudly discussing some important topic in their native Welsh. That topic, as the landlord took care to inform him more than once, was neither more nor less than the finding of the long-sought-for box by the divers. At last he felt that he must either leave the house or go mad. So he wandered out into a quiet lane at the back of the village, and there sat down on the trunk of a felled tree.

What should he do ? What ought his next step to be ? His mind was all in a maze of doubt and terror and perplexity. Should he hurry off to London by the first train, secure all his available property, shut up his house in Spur Alley, and drop quietly out of sight where no possible search for him could be made ? Or should he stay and brave out everything ?

Presently he began to feel very lonely among the dim shadows of the silent lane. He fancied that he heard voices whispering, and the faint rustle of garments, as if some one were watching him stealthily through the foliage at his back. He looked round with a shudder, and then he rose and walked swiftly forward. In a little while the lane took him to a rising ground that overlooked the village and the sea. On his right, and no great distance away, rose the cliff on the summit of which was built the hotel where Byrne and Miriam were staying. Several of the windows were lighted up. Which were the windows of Miriam's room, he wondered? In the midst of all his doubts and fears for his own safety, he could not help thinking about the girl who had played such a short but important part in the strange drama of his life. He had no bitterer thought, even at this bitter hour, than the knowledge that this girl, whom he had learnt to love so passionately, had not only never cared for him, but had duped him from the very first; that all her

smiles and looks and words had been utterly false ; that it was her hand, and hers alone, that had struck him down ; that but for her no harm could have happened to him ; that but for her, the silver-clamped box, with its damning evidence, would have rested till doomsday at the bottom of the sea.

Without knowing or caring whither it might lead him, he had unconsciously taken a footpath which brought him presently to a little side wicket that opened into the grounds of the hotel. From the wicket a winding path led upward through thick clumps of evergreens and brushwood to the house. There was for him, in his present mood, a sort of fascination, a grim satisfaction, in the thought of being so near these cunning enemies of his, who seemed so thoroughly bent on hunting him down, while all the time they believed him to be hundreds of miles away. He had little or no sense of present fear upon him. His dread lay in the unknown future. The next blow that would be struck at him

would not be struck here, but in London. So long as these people stayed in Wales, he was safe. They had done their worst for a little time to come.

He passed through the wicket, but as soon as he found himself in the grounds of the hotel, he diverged from the pathway on to the grass, where his footsteps were inaudible, and where the evergreens would shelter him from the view of any passer-by. But perfect quiet reigned around; not a sign of life was anywhere visible. No portion of the hotel could be seen from where he was now, but he knew in which direction it lay; and without knowing or caring to think why he did so, he kept pressing slowly forward and upward, till at length he emerged from the shrubbery into a more open part of the grounds, and there in the starlight he could see the big white building straight before him.

On one side, the hotel was built close up to the edge of the cliff, which here sloped down to the beach, and the base of which was washed by every tide. Huge boulders

and jagged pieces of rock protruded here and there from the face of the cliff; but these rugged features were softened and harmonized by the numerous tufts of broom and dwarf brushwood that grew among and around them, and by the soft, green mosses and many-coloured lichens that nestled between them, and crept lovingly over them, and made them beautiful with a beauty that was other than their own. Up the face of this cliff a goat or a chamois might probably have climbed by leaping from rock to rock, or from one clump of brushwood to another; but no human foot had ever been known to venture up or down it.

It was now dark, and these more minute features of the scene were invisible to Max Van Duren. All that he could discern was, that the hotel was built close to the edge of the cliff, at the bottom of which cliff the tide was now washing heavily in with the noise of low thunder.

Having satisfied himself that there was no one about, Van Duren left the shelter of

the shrubbery through which he had hitherto crept, and swiftly crossing the intervening open space, he sought the shelter of another fringe of shrubbery which grew between the gradually rising edge of the cliff and the carriage-drive that led up to the main entrance of the hotel. Keeping well within the shade of the evergreens, and climbing higher step by step, a few minutes more brought him close up to one corner of the house. It was now requisite to move with extreme caution. Suddenly he heard the sound of voices, and two or three loud good-nights. Some one was evidently leaving the hotel, and would pass close by him in a few moments. It would never do to be found there ; so he plunged deeper into the shrubbery, and presently found himself close to one of the lighted windows that he had seen from the valley below. He hardly knew whether to advance or retire. The question was, Who were the occupants of the room ? If strangers only, he would go quietly back by the way he had come ; but if there was

a chance of seeing Miriam—well, to see her again, he was prepared to risk much. He hated her, or fancied that he did, and yet there was still a strange fascination for him in the thought that he was close to her, that he was only separated from her by the thickness of a wall. Had he met her there alone in the shrubbery, he would have strangled her, but after that he would have kissed her and wept over her, and would probably have ended all by jumping over the cliff.

He crept close up to the window and peered through the venetians. Fortunately for his purpose, they were not very closely drawn, and he could see into the room without difficulty. It was a large room, and was lighted by another window opposite to that through which Van Duren was now looking. This second window—a French one, by the way—was wide open, for the evening was somewhat sultry. Beyond it was a small balcony, and then the cliff, and, a hundred feet below, the white-lipped waves. Round a table in the

middle of the room, four gentlemen were seated in earnest conversation. Three of them Van Duren had never seen before, but in the fourth he had no difficulty in recognizing his quondam lodger, Mr. Peter Byrne. It is true that the white locks, the hump, and the general air of feebleness and decrepitude had all disappeared ; but Byrne's strongly-marked features could not be mistaken for those of any other man. But hardly had Van Duren time to notice all this, before his eyes were drawn to and concentrated on an object that was standing in the middle of the table. He shuddered from head to foot, and turned suddenly sick as he looked. He had recognized the object in a moment. It was the silver-clamped box which the divers had brought up from the bottom of the sea : it was the box for the sake of which Paul Stilling had been stabbed in his sleep.

Was the box full or empty ? The lid was open, but Van Duren could not see inside. Anyhow, there was the box. What a host of terrible memories the sight of it

called up in his mind! Trifling circumstances, all but forgotten, and that he had thrust persistently from his memory years ago, came back now with the vivid clearness of a photograph. Stilling's drunken laugh, the peculiar nervous twitching of his left eye, the broken nail on one of his fingers, the very patch on one of his boots, quizzically commented on by him as he was pulling on his slippers in front of the fire—how they all came back to Van Duren! As he stood there, it seemed to him but a few yesterdays, instead of twenty long years, since—

He drew out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead, and shut out the sight for a moment. When he looked again, Miriam was there. She was bending over the back of her father's chair and saying something in his ear. She had never looked sweeter, in Van Duren's eyes, than she looked tonight, with her soft flowing grenadine dress, and her bows of ribbon here and there, and a tea-rose in her hair.

He would have given all he had in the

world, everything save life itself, to have called this girl his own and have won one smile of real love from her beautiful lips. Presently she lifted up a face that was radiant with smiles, then she pinched her father's ear playfully, and turned and left the room. And that was the last time that Max Van Duren ever set eyes on Miriam Byrne.

A few minutes later the four gentlemen rose and left the room. They left the box behind them, still standing wide open in the middle of the table. From this Van Duren at once concluded that it must have been emptied of its contents. Had it not, they would hardly have left it there unguarded. Then all at once the thought struck Van Duren that if he could only obtain possession of the box, if he could only steal it away unknown to anyone, then would his enemies be deprived of the strongest link in their evidence against him —perhaps the only link of any value in a court of justice. The box could undoubtedly be sworn to as being that which had at one time belonged to Paul Stilling;

but could the contents of the box, after twenty years' immersion in the sea, be sworn to with equal certainty ? To him that seemed very doubtful indeed. In any case the chain of evidence against him would certainly be weakened in a material degree should the box not be producible by the prosecution. It would be worth risking much to obtain it. There it was within a few yards of him, in an empty room ; why should he not take possession of it again, as he had done once before, long years ago ? Not a sound could anywhere be heard save the low thunder of the incoming tide. But how was it possible for him to get into the room, unseen and unheard ? He tried the sash of the window against which he was standing. Fortunately for his purpose, it proved to be unfastened. All that he had to do was to push up the sash sufficiently high, climb over the low window sill, thrust aside the venetians, and the box would be within reach of his hand. Five minutes would suffice for everything. If only he could make sure that no one would

enter the room for five short minutes ! But of that he could by no means make sure ; he must run the risk of it. But even while these thoughts were in his mind, his hands had been busy with the window, and almost before he knew what had happened, he found that he had pushed up the sash high enough to admit of his ingress to the room.

A minute later, and his hand was on the box. Even at such a moment as that it thrilled him strangely to touch it. He glanced into it: it was empty, as he had felt sure that it would be. Then he shut down the lid, and taking up the box, he placed it under his arm and turned to go. But at this instant the door was quickly opened, and some one came into the room. Van Duren turned instinctively, and as his eyes met those of the man who had entered, he gave utterance to a low cry of terror and surprise.

There before him stood the man whom he had so terribly wronged—whom he had consigned without remorse to a living tomb

—who would have become the hangman's prey had not his brain been too weak to bear the burden of his doom. This man, then, it was—who he had fondly believed in his heart must have died long ago—this man it was, who, like a sleuth hound, was now on his track, determined to hunt him down without mercy and without ruth. Ambrose Murray was but a wreck of his former self, but Max Van Duren knew him again the moment his eyes fell on him.

Murray, in his turn, did not fail to recognise Van Duren. “Wretch! what do you here?” he exclaimed, as he advanced into the room. His right hand was buried in the breast of his frock-coat—an habitual action with him; but Van Duren took it at once that his fingers were grasping some hidden weapon, and as Murray advanced he fell back step by step.

He did not answer Murray's question. He seemed, indeed, as though he had not heard it. His face worked with emotion. Surprise, and terror, and anger seemed to

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glare out of his eyes in turn ; but still he did not speak.

On first entering the room Murray had not missed the box ; but now his eyes travelled from Van Duren to the table, and then back again, and he understood everything.

“ Villain ! bloodthirsty villain !” he cried. “ Would you steal that box a second time ?” and with that he took two or three rapid strides towards Van Duren.

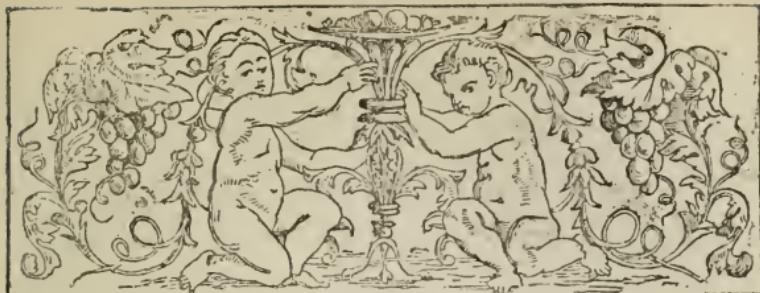
But the other, still without answering, and still facing his enemy, fell quickly back. Murray was now between him and the window by which he had entered ; but he seemed to remember that there was another window behind him, and it was towards this that he was now making his way. He still evidently suspected that Murray’s hand held a pistol, and that he might be fired at any moment.

The latter continued to advance. “ Max Jacoby, I have you at last, and this time you shall not escape me !” he exclaimed,

and therewith he strode swiftly to the bell-rope and pulled it violently.

But at the first sound of the bell, Van Duren turned quickly and made for the open French window. Before Murray had time to utter a single word of warning, he was on the balcony. Next moment his hand grasped the railing, and with a loud, mocking laugh he vaulted over and disappeared in the darkness below. He had either not known, or had forgotten, that the balcony was built immediately over the edge of the cliff.

A few moments later Peter Byrne and two or three others hurried into the room in response to the bell's imperative summons. Ambrose Murray was lying senseless on the floor, and the silver-clamped box was no longer there.



CHAPTER VII.

THE MESSAGE TO STAMMARS.

IT was on the forenoon of a certain Saturday in May that Olive Deane found herself jogging slowly along the road that leads from Pembridge to Stammars. The morning was sunny and the road pleasant, but Olive had no eyes for anything: her own tortuous thoughts occupied her fully. Should she break as gently as possible the news she had to tell, and then give Eleanor the letter after having thus paved the way? Should she put the letter into her hand without a word, and simply wait to

be questioned as to anything further that she might be supposed to know? Or—and this was the course that approved itself more fully to her—should she say nothing about the letter, but tell the news her own way, with sting and venom, and before whatever audience chance might give her an opportunity of assembling to hear it? Over and over in her mind she kept revolving these different courses, as the ramshackle old fly in which she was seated jolted and creaked its way slowly along the quiet country roads.

Lady Dudgeon, released at length from further attendance on her sick sister, was panting to get back to London for the remainder of the season. Sir Thomas, accompanied by his faithful Gerald, had come down on the Friday to fetch her ladyship. They were to stay at Stammars over the week end, but on the Monday morning the whole family would go up to town.

In due course, Miss Deane arrived at Stammars, only to find that Lady Dudgeon, accompanied by Miss Lloyd, had gone shop-

ping to Pembridge, and that she must have passed them somewhere on the road. They would, however, so she was assured, be back in time for luncheon, so she made up her mind to await their return. Sir Thomas and Mr. Pomeroy were somewhere about, so the servant told her; but them, at present, she did not want to see. The young ladies, Sophy and Carry, had gone with their mamma, so that Miss Deane was left perforce to the evil company of her own thoughts. "Miss Lloyd, indeed!" muttered Olive, when the servant had left the room. "This is the last day that she will have a right to call herself by that name. What will her name be to-morrow? Should her ladyship have occasion to go shopping to-morrow, will she take this nameless pauper with her in her carriage? Not if Lady Dudgeon is the woman I take her to be."

After all, she had not long to wait—but little over an hour—before she saw the Dudgeon equipage rolling solemnly up the main avenue of the park. Her colour-

less cheeks flushed while she looked. Her heart beat painfully. The moment so long looked forward to was close at hand.

She was still undecided as to the precise mode in which her communication should be made to Eleanor. She found it impossible to make up her mind. Circumstances at the last moment would probably decide for her.

From the place where she was standing she could see the entire length of the avenue. She could see the two fat greys and the fat coachman, as they came nearer with every moment, but not yet could she see who was in the carriage behind—the carriage respecting which her ladyship had spoken in such disparaging terms to her husband, but which was still deemed good enough for country wear. Presently she saw Sir Thomas and Mr. Pomeroy emerge from the shrubbery and go to meet the carriage. Then it stopped, and Lady Dudgeon and Miss Lloyd alighted, and all four walked slowly towards the

house. Gerald and Eleanor lingered a little behind the baronet and his wife, and to Olive's jaundiced eyes they seemed to be deep in earnest and loving conversation. In fancy she heard Pomeroy's low and tender tones and Eleanor's half-breathed replies. She set her teeth, and her lips tightened as she looked. "Before they are two hours older," she murmured under her breath, "he shall know that she is a beggar, and she shall know that her hero is nothing better than a vulgar adventurer!" And in the heat of her passion she took Matthew Kelvin's letter out of her pocket and tore it in two. "What has to be told I will tell in my own way. I have been a fool to hesitate so long."

But Olive was altogether mistaken in imagining that Pomeroy and Miss Lloyd were whispering love's sweet nothings to each other as they walked across the park. Gerald was merely giving, in animated terms, a description of the last new opera, which he had been to see a few nights previously. Eleanor hungered, but hungered

in vain, for one tone of affection, for one whispered word of love. He knew that she was going away—going to leave Stammars, probably for ever—and yet he made no sign. She had long ago forgiven the deception that he had practised on her; he could hardly help seeing that she had forgiven him; and yet he still maintained the reserved and impassive demeanour that had marked him from the day of his confession in the library. Perhaps, after all, his love for her had been nothing more than a passing fancy. If such were indeed the case, if he felt that he had been mistaken, if his affection for her was not of a texture sufficiently strong to stand the wear and tear of a lifetime, then he was right to draw back while there was yet time to do so. His doing so proved one thing: that although, in the first instance, he had sought her for her wealth, and although his confession had led her to believe that he now loved her purely for herself, yet when he discovered that he had over-rated the strength of his feelings, he

had retired honourably from the field, instead of staying to win her, as he might so easily have done, and with her that money which had first tempted him to follow her. To know this was only a poor sort of consolation, but it was better than none. How strange it seemed to her that she should have given her heart away to this man, given it beyond all power of recall, and yet that he should have nothing to give her in return! Was the romance of her life to have this poor and ignoble ending? It seemed so, indeed, just now. She only knew that, despite all the arguments urged by her pride, her love was still his as thoroughly as ever it had been. He was chatting to her now, as they walked up the avenue together, as any ordinary acquaintance might have done, of the new opera and the new *prima donna*, and yet how happy she felt to be walking by his side, how she had thrilled from head to foot when she first caught sight of him standing there with Sir Thomas! Yes, whether he loved her, or whether he hated

her—her heart was still his beyond all possibility of recall.

If Eleanor had but known how much it cost Gerald to maintain this cold and reserved demeanour towards her! If she had but known how he longed to clasp her to his heart, and whisper in her ear how fondly he loved her! He often felt that not much longer would his tongue keep silence; that some moment, perhaps when he himself least intended it, the pent-up words would burst from his lips, his arms would stretch themselves forth and draw her to him, and in a few brief moments everything would be told. The task he had imposed on himself was fast becoming unbearable—would have become altogether unbearable, but that happily there seemed at last a prospect of its coming to a speedy end. He had had a letter from Marhyddoc, in which Ambrose Murray held out strong hopes of his search being brought to a successful issue. Should such really prove to be the case, then would Murray's first task be, with the proofs of his innocence in his hands, to seek the

daughter whom he had hitherto refused to claim. Then would the necessity for this odious concealment come to an end ; then would everything be told to Eleanor. Therefore did Gerald school himself to keep silence for a little while longer, hoping and believing that the future would compensate for everything.

Miss Deane's eager eyes watched the party of four come slowly up the avenue, and saw them at length ascend the steps and enter the house. Inside the hall Sir Thomas and Pomeroy went off together to the library, while Eleanor accompanied Lady Dudgeon to her sitting-room. Five minutes later a servant came to tell Olive that her ladyship would see her. The moment so intensely longed for had come at last. Olive's pale face grew a shade paler as she followed the servant along the passage.

Lady Dudgeon was seated at her davenport as usual. Miss Lloyd was sitting close by, finishing a sketch in water-colours. "Good morning, Miss Deane ; I am pleased

to see you. I hope Mr. Kelvin is no worse," said her ladyship, offering Olive two frigid fingers.

"Mr. Kelvin is no worse, madam, than he has been all along. He is still very ill —too ill to leave his room; and having something of importance to communicate, and being still too weak to write down the particulars, he has deputed me to come in his stead."

"Something of importance to communicate to me or to Sir Thomas?" asked her ladyship. Eleanor rose and was about to leave the room.

"My errand is to Miss Lloyd. It concerns her more nearly than anyone else."

"Eleanor, my love, had you not better take Miss Deane to your own room?"

Eleanor flushed a little. In her heart she had never liked Olive. She had always had a vague distrust and dread of her. How such a feeling had originated she could not have told: none the less it was there. "I have no secrets from you, Lady Dudgeon," said Eleanor. "Whatever Miss

Deane may have to communicate can just as well be told here as elsewhere."

"Are you sure that you would not prefer to see her alone?"

"Quite sure."

"Then Miss Deane may as well be seated." And her ladyship dipped her pen in her inkstand, and made believe that she was about to go on with her correspondence.

Miss Deane drew a chair quietly forward and sat down. Eleanor, looking distrustfully at her, caught a momentary glance out of her black eyes, so full of malignant triumph that her heart sank within her, and a presage of coming misfortune chilled her suddenly from head to foot.

"When Mr. Jacob Lloyd died," began Olive in a low voice, ignoring Eleanor, and addressing her remarks directly to Lady Dudgeon, "he left behind him a large quantity of miscellaneous papers. Those papers were taken possession of by my cousin, Mr. Kelvin, whose intention it was to go through them, arrange them, and in-

dorse them at his leisure. This process was interrupted by his sudden illness. During the last few days, however, feeling somewhat stronger, he has endeavoured to occupy himself with them for an hour or two now and then. Yesterday he came across a document in Mr. Lloyd's own writing of a very singular nature indeed."

She paused for a moment, as if to gather breath. Then she went on, speaking more slowly and deliberately than before, so that each word might go home to her hearers, and with her eyes still fixed on Lady Dudgeon.

"It is a document which would seem to prove conclusively that the young lady hitherto known as Miss Eleanor Lloyd was not the daughter of the late Mr. Jacob Lloyd—nor indeed any relative of his whatever, but simply the child of some unknown parents, adopted by Mr. Lloyd and his wife out of charity or compassion."

Eleanor's face by this time was whiter than Olive's. She did not speak, but sat staring "with wide-open eyes, as in a pic-

ture," and with one hand grasping the back of a chair, as if to keep herself from falling.

"Good gracious me! whatever is the woman talking about?" cried her ladyship, taking off her double eye-glass, as if to make sure that it was really Olive Deane who was sitting there.

"Mr. Lloyd, as your ladyship may remember," resumed Olive, without heeding the interruption, "died very suddenly, and without making a will. This young lady,"—indicating Eleanor by a slight inclination of the head—"has, consequently, no claim whatever to a single sixpence of Mr. Lloyd's property. She is, in fact, neither more nor less than a pauper."

At this word a little cry burst involuntarily from Eleanor. She ran to Lady Dudgeon, and sinking on one knee, buried her face in the elder lady's lap.

"Miss Deane, you forget yourself!" said Lady Dudgeon, with severity. "You forget that Miss Lloyd is my guest."

"I ask your ladyship's pardon if I have

committed any offence. I was but making a simple statement of fact."

"That has yet to be proved. But, in any case, the statement was most offensively made." Then she patted Eleanor's cheek affectionately. "Keep up your spirits, my dear. Don't get downhearted. There must be a mistake somewhere. Miss Deane's story sounds far too romantic to be true."

"I believe your ladyship is sufficiently acquainted with Mr. Kelvin," said Olive, not without a touch of sternness, "to be quite aware that he is not a man who would be likely to send me to Stammars on such an errand as this unless he were perfectly sure of the facts he had to go upon. Had there been any doubt in the matter, I should not have been here to-day."

"Oh, Lady Dudgeon, it is not that I fear poverty!" cried Eleanor. "Don't think that. You know that I have never really valued the riches that were said to be mine."

"That's true enough," murmured her ladyship.

“ It is the thought of having lost the dearest and kindest man that ever breathed that wrings my heart. I have lost—my father !”

“ Hush, my dear—hush ! Even if it should turn out that you are not Mr. Lloyd’s daughter in reality, you will always have the consolation of knowing that he loved you as such. Nothing can deprive you of that.” Then turning to Olive, she added : “ Since Mr. Kelvin has made this very clever discovery—which, mind you, as I said before, has yet got to be proved—he is, doubtless, clever enough to have found out the person to whom Mr. Lloyd’s property really does belong ?”

“ The heir-at-law is a certain Mr. Gerald Warburton, a nephew of Mr. Lloyd, but a person whom Mr. Kelvin has never seen.”

“ But a person with whom he will at once place himself in communication ?”

“ Undoubtedly, madam.”

“ Miss Lloyd’s interests in this matter must not be allowed to suffer. The case appears to be one that requires the most

minute and strict investigation, and I shall at once place it in the hands of Mr. Barclay."

Olive bowed.

"Mr. Kelvin will no doubt either seek an interview with Miss Lloyd, or write her full particulars, as soon as he is strong enough to do so."

"I decline to let Miss Lloyd be troubled in the affair. She is going up to town with me on Monday next. Mr. Kelvin had better communicate direct with Mr. Barclay."

Again Olive bowed.

"I will not fail to deliver your ladyship's message."

"Perhaps, after all, it's quite as well that you did not marry Captain Dayrell," said Lady Dudgeon to Eleanor. "He would hardly have liked having to give up your dowry."

Eleanor rose to her feet, and stood for a few moments with her hands pressed to her temples, as though striving to realize to herself the strange tidings that had just

been told her. "I have no name—no home," she said, in a dreamy way, as if communing with herself. "I can work for my living; I am not afraid of that. But—but I have lost my father, and I have no name!"

At this instant the door was opened, and in walked Sir Thomas.

"Eh—what's this?—what's this?" he said, cheerfully. "Hope I'm not intruding, as what's-his-name says in the play. Rehearsing a little comedietta, or what?"

"Run away to your room now, my dear," said Lady Dudgeon, as she rose and kissed Eleanor. "Every cloud has its silver lining. Keep up your spirits, and remember that you shall never want for a home as long as Sir Thomas and I are on this side of the grave."

Eleanor did not wait for another word, but hurried out by the opposite door as Sir Thomas came forward. Then the baronet had to be told everything, and it is needless to say how great was his surprise,

which he expressed in far more voluble terms than his wife had done.

“If our Nelly ain’t Jacob Lloyd’s daughter, whose child is she?” he said, after he had had time to calm down a little. “Kelvin found that out, I suppose, at the same time that he found out the other.”

“At present he has no clue whatever to the parentage of Miss Lloyd.”

“Why, it’s quite a romance! I must call and see Kelvin to-morrow, and talk it over with him myself.”

“To-morrow is Sunday, Sir Thomas,” said her ladyship, severely. “And on Monday morning we start for town.”

“Ah, so we do,” said the baronet, scratching his chin with an air of perplexity.

“I have decided to place Eleanor’s interests in the hands of Mr. Barclay, so that the less you interfere personally in the matter the better.”

“Quite right, my dear, quite right. But what’s to become of the poor girl meanwhile?”

“ For the present she will stay with us, as usual. It is too early yet to legislate for her future.”

Her ladyship said this with an air that seemed to forbid further discussion. Her husband took the hint, and remarking that he had several important letters to write, he trotted back to the library.

“ I am going to have a cup of chocolate in my dressing-room,” said her ladyship to Olive. “ Unless you are in a hurry to get back home, you may come and keep me company.”

Olive was in no hurry to get back ; in fact, she had something for her ladyship’s private ear, and was glad of such an opportunity for telling it.

Lady Dudgeon, on her side, was actuated by a very natural desire to elicit from Miss Deane some further particulars of the strange story which she had just heard. She felt sure that there must be several interesting details, which it might not be advisable that Eleanor should be made acquainted with, but which Miss Deane could

have no object in keeping from her. It was certainly not her intention to cross-question Olive—she was above doing that—a delicate hint to Miss Deane that her ladyship was willing to listen to anything she might feel disposed to tell her, ought to be sufficient to elicit any details that might hitherto have been kept in the background.

Notwithstanding the kind way in which she had spoken to Eleanor, Lady Dudgeon felt very considerably annoyed in her own mind at the thought that her pet protégée, whom she had taken everywhere and introduced to everybody, lauding her to the skies as everything that was good and beautiful, and who had, in a certain sense, as the presumed heiress of twenty thousand pounds, shed a reflected lustre on her chaperon, should turn out to be nobody knew whom, and without a sixpence to call her own. Nothing could have been more mortifying. She had liked the girl from a child, and would no doubt have continued to like her just as much had Jacob Lloyd

died a bankrupt, and would probably have made a sort of humble companion of her, or would, in any case, have seen that she was properly provided for ; but to have introduced the girl to all her fine friends and acquaintances on a footing of equality, and now to discover that she had no claim to the status so given her—that was indeed a bitter pill for her ladyship to swallow.

She knew well—no one better—how censorious is that Society of which she herself formed a component atom ; how one of the chief conditions of its existence is that it shall revenge itself without mercy on every *faux pas* of its votaries in which they may be found out. She knew quite well the sort of remarks that people would make. They would say that she had wilfully allowed herself to become a party to a fraud. They would say that she had done her best to pass off a portionless girl as an heiress, and, in the eyes of Society, what crime could well be more heinous than that?

It was very, very mortifying, and she could not help, in her secret heart, visit-

ing upon Eleanor some portion of blame for what had happened. It seemed well-nigh incredible to her that the girl could have lived all these years in utter ignorance that she was not Jacob Lloyd's daughter. Of course, all these minor points would have to be inquired into and thoroughly sifted later on. Much bitterness was yet to come, but the foretaste she had of it already was very far from being to her liking.

Not a shadow of all this was discernible in her ladyship's manner as Miss Deane followed her upstairs ; but Olive had a poisoned arrow in her quiver of which Lady Dudgeon knew nothing.

A cup of chocolate was brought for each of them, and Lady Dudgeon, as she sipped at hers, chatted away to her companion about Sophy and Carry, and what girls they were for wearing out their boots ; about the late flower show ; about Mrs. Diplock's last baby, and the state of Mr. Kelvin's health —while waiting for an opportunity to work the conversation round to the desired point.

But Olive was in no mood for such manœuvring. She had something to say, and she was determined to say it. A break in the flow of her ladyship's small-talk was caused by the intrusion of a servant to ask a question, and Olive seized the opportunity.

"There is one circumstance that took place while I was at Stammars," she began, "which I have sometimes thought since I ought to have mentioned to your ladyship at the time. To-day I regret more than ever that I omitted to do so."

"To what circumstance do you allude, Miss Deane?"

"Your ladyship must please to pardon the question, but did it never strike you, did you never notice, that there was some hidden understanding between Miss Lloyd and Mr. Pomeroy?"

"Good gracious, Miss Deane, whatever do you mean?"

Lady Dudgeon was surprised for the moment out of her assumed equability.

“To put the case in plain language, and it will perhaps be best to do so,” said Olive, “has your ladyship never had reason to suspect that Miss Lloyd and Mr. Pomeroy were engaged to each other?”

“Impossible! such a thing is utterly impossible!” was Lady Dudgeon’s emphatic reply. “I know Miss Lloyd too well to believe anything of the kind. For once, Miss Deane, your surmises have led you altogether astray.”

“Possibly so; I hope so,” said Olive, resignedly.

There was an awkward silence. Her ladyship fidgeted, but said nothing. Singular to say, she seemed far more put out by what Olive had just said to her than by the far more important disclosure that had been made to her half an hour previously.

“You—you mentioned some circumstance,” she said at last, not without a touch of irritation. She felt as though Olive were doing her a personal injury.

“Yes; a little circumstance of which I

was the accidental witness. But probably your ladyship will not think it worth while to listen to it."

"Probably it is not worth listening to, but still there can be no harm in your telling me."

"One evening, some two or three weeks before my cousin was taken ill," began Olive, "I was sitting in the bow-window of the back drawing-room. The curtains were partly drawn, and when Miss Lloyd came into the room she did not see me. She sat down at the piano and began to play: and as there was no third person present, I saw no reason for making my presence known. But after a time Mr. Pomeroy came in. He had just returned from a journey, and was evidently in search of Miss Lloyd. He hurried up to her, and, before I had time to say a word, he had folded her in his arms. Then he called her his darling, and kissed her several times."

"How dreadful—how very dreadful!" exclaimed Lady Dudgeon, with a sort of terror.

"And then——Miss Lloyd kissed him back."

Lady Dudgeon could only put down her cup of chocolate and groan.

In saying that Eleanor kissed Gerald back, Olive told a lie, a weakness that she was never guilty of unless she had some particular end to serve.

"And do you really mean to affirm, Miss Deane, that you saw these—these shocking things with your own eyes?" Lady Dudgeon contrived to say at last.

"Certainly; exactly as I have told your ladyship."

It was indeed dreadful. She had been hoodwinked and bamboozled under her own roof, and by this girl for whom she had done and sacrificed so much. Her feelings had been outraged in their tenderest point. Eleanor Lloyd was deposed from her throne for ever. What could any one do for a person who could so far forget what was due both to herself and others?

Lady Dudgeon strove her hardest to hide from Olive the effect which her words

had upon her. "Well, well, young people will be young people till the end of the chapter," she said at last, with a ghastly attempt at cheerfulness.

"Mr. Pomeroy will now have an opportunity of proving the disinterestedness of his affection," said Olive, in her slow, incisive way. "He can now let the world see that it was not Miss Lloyd's money, but Miss Lloyd herself, that he fell in love with."

"What a strange person you are, Miss Deane!" her ladyship could not help saying.

Olive smiled coldly, and then rose to go.



CHAPTER VIII.

WINGED WORDS.

Twas not in the nature of things that Sir Thomas Dudgeon should long keep to himself the news which had just been told him.

He was bursting to tell somebody, and as Gerald was to a certain extent one of the family, it seemed only right that Gerald should know all. So into the sympathetic ear of his secretary the whole story was volubly poured, with many a comment, and many an expression of sympathy for poor unfortunate Eleanor. "I feel as if I loved her better now than ever I did before,"

the baronet finished up by saying. "She shall never want for a home as long as I'm master at Stammars."

"It has come at last, and I'm glad of it," said Gerald to himself, "and has thereby saved me [the necessity of telling a very disagreeable story. I can't at all understand why Kelvin should have kept this knowledge to himself for so long a time. There seems to me something strangely underhand in his way of dealing with the affair. However, better late than never—better that she should hear it from him than from me. I must go and find her at once."

Fortunately, Sir Thomas did not detain him long. The old gentleman was anxious to have an hour or two with Cozzard, and to go round the farm on Grey Dapple once again. He sighed to think that it would be his last opportunity for doing so before his return to that hateful London. On Monday morning they were all to go up to town, and then farewell to the dear delights

of the country for at least two months to come.

Gerald's puzzle was how to contrive an interview with Eleanor without the knowledge of Lady Dudgeon. As it happened, he was on pretty good terms with Tipper, the young person who, among her other duties, acted as maid to Miss Lloyd. Her he now contrived to capture, and putting half-a-crown into one of her hands, and a note into the other, he found no difficulty in inducing her to do his bidding. All he said in the note was—

“Pray do me the favour of meeting me for five minutes in the conservatory as soon as possible.”

Ten minutes later Eleanor was there.

A faint blush suffused her face as she came towards Gerald, but it was easy to see that she had been crying. She took Gerald's extended hand frankly, and then, before she knew how it happened, he had possession of the other one also.

“I have heard everything,” he said, “and I could not rest till I had seen you.”

She did not answer for a moment, but her eyes flushed with tears, and Gerald felt her hands tremble within his like two frightened birds.

“It is a very strange story,” she said, “and I feel at present that I cannot altogether realize it.”

“It is indeed a strange story—far too strange for Kelvin to lend himself to unless he had satisfied himself that it was true.”

“The hardest—the bitterest part is to discover that he whom I loved so dearly while he lived, and whose memory I have cherished so fondly since I lost him, was not my father—was nothing but my benefactor. It makes me feel as if there were no such thing as reality in the world, as if life itself were nothing more substantial than a dream.” She sighed, and releasing her hands from Love’s sweet custody, she went and sat down on a garden-chair, and Gerald seated himself close by her.

“Nothing can change my love for him, or cause it to diminish by one iota,” she said. “If he was not my father in reality,

he acted a father's part by me, and he was my father in the sight of Heaven. God bless him ! God bless him for ever !” she said passionately, and then she burst into sobs.

Gerald thought it best to say nothing for a little while ; but he took her hand and pressed it softly to his lips, and was not repulsed.

In four or five minutes Eleanor had recovered her calmness. “ You asked me to meet you here, Mr. Pomeroy,” she said, “ having something, I presume, that you wish to say to me, and here am I monopolising your time with my own selfish troubles. But you must forgive me this once, and I will not offend again.”

“ You are right. I have something to say to you,” said Gerald, earnestly. “ Sir Thomas has told me everything. You are no longer the heiress people believed you to be. You are poor like myself. Pray pardon my frankness ; but that very poverty it is that gives me courage to speak.” He paused for a moment, and in

the pause they both heard the plashing of a tiny fountain in the distance, and the crabbed voice of old Sanderson crooning some old-world ballad to himself as he bent over his work.

“Several weeks ago, in a moment of forgetfulness,” resumed Gerald, “I said certain words to you which, bearing in mind the reason that first brought me to Stammars, ought never to have been said by me. I confessed my fault, and you forgave me. Since that time, whatever my feelings may have been, I have so far schooled myself as not to offend again. Now the case is different. No one can say now that I seek you for your money. The reason which has kept me silent so long exists no longer. To-day —here—now—I can tell you how dearly I love you—how dearly I have loved you from the moment I first saw you! Here, to-day, I ask you whether you can give me back love for love, heart for heart—whether you can learn to care for me sufficiently to share your poverty with my poverty and to become my wife?”

Again he stooped and kissed her hand, but she would not let him keep it. Her eyes were wet, her bosom heaving. Her colour came and went, then left her altogether. Twice she tried to speak, but could not.

“Oh, Mr. Pomeroy,” she said at last, “your words have come upon me so suddenly that indeed I know not how to answer them! Your pride would not let you seek me when you believed me to be rich: my pride will not let me give myself to you now that I am poor.”

“But supposing,” said Gerald, “that I had come to you at eleven o’clock this morning —supposing I had come to you five minutes before Miss Deane delivered her message, and had asked you then to become my wife, what would your answer have been?”

This was a question that seemed to require consideration.

“When you asked me to meet you here, I thought you had something to tell me. I did not know that I was coming here to be catechised.”

“What I had to tell you I have told. To you, perhaps, it seems hardly worth the hearing. To me it means everything.”

She turned her eyes for a moment on his. Their glance seemed to say, “Pity my embarrassment, and don’t say cruel things to me.”

“I must repeat my question,” said Gerald. “If you were as rich to-day as you believed yourself to be yesterday, and I were what I am, would you in that case reject my suit as positively as you are doing now?”

“I hardly know. Perhaps not,” was the whispered answer.

“Those words are enough. They tell me everything—they tell me all that I want to know!” cried Gerald. “If you would not have rejected me yesterday, you shall not reject me to-day!” and before Eleanor knew what had happened, she was folded tightly in his arms, and a rain of sweet kisses was falling on her forehead, her eyes, and her lips.

It was fully half a minute before she

could free herself. "You are the most impetuous person I ever met with," she said. "And see how you have crushed my collar, and disarranged my hair. It's—it's really disgraceful." And with that she turned of her own accord, and shyly hid her face on Gerald's shoulder.



CHAPTER IX.

VAN DUREN'S FLIGHT.

WHEN Max Van Duren came to his senses he found himself in darkness and alone. A low damp wind was blowing in from the sea, sighing and groaning as if burdened with messages from the dying to loved ones at home. The tide had come to its height, and was now flowing out again, with deep muttered undertones that lent solemnity to the darkness. Van Duren's first thought was that he had died and was coming to life again in another world. Presently he felt something trickling slowly

and softly down his face, and his finger, following the tiny stream to its source, found that it proceeded from a huge gash in the side of his head. Then in a flash the whole circumstances of the evening came back to him—the scene in the room at the hotel, his attempt to steal the casket, the sudden apparition of Ambrose Murray, the scene in the balcony, and his own wild leap out into the darkness. Whither had that leap landed him ? He was now lying on his side, and he contrived to raise himself on one elbow and look round, but only to fall back next minute with a groan. He could see the sky and he could hear the sea, and he could make out that his body seemed to be lying among some large stones or pieces of rock, but beyond that he could tell nothing. He lay very quiet for a little while, thinking with all his might. What troubled him most of all—far more than his own present condition—was the doubt as to whether the vision of Ambrose Murray, which he had seen in the room was that of a real man or was merely a spectre. He was

no believer in ghosts—or he told himself that he was not, despite his strange experience of the face in the glass—but for all that, he was inclined to doubt the bodily existence of Murray. “I was weak and ill and excited,” he said to himself. “I had eaten nothing for four-and-twenty hours. My nerves were in a state of tension that had become almost unbearable. I was just in a condition to see or imagine anything. I had been thinking of Murray, and I imagined that I saw him there bodily before me. If my brain had only been as cool then as it is now, I should never have seen him. With the daylight these silly fancies will vanish—but will it ever be daylight again?”

Even while he was reasoning with himself, a thin streak of pallid grey was beginning to lighten in the east, though he saw it not for a little while. He was weak with long fasting and loss of blood. The calmness of despair had settled down upon him. He neither knew where he was nor cared greatly to know. Had anyone been

there to whom he could have given himself up, he would have yielded himself willingly. "The game's played out and I have lost it," he muttered to himself again and again.

But little by little the dawn broadened, and the stars paled one by one, and with the slow coming of the daylight there grew upon Van Duren a restless desire to know what it was that had really befallen him. His mood changed. The wish to live, to escape, began to grow again within him. But first to ascertain where he was and what had happened to him. Bit by bit, as the daylight deepened, and first one object and then another shaped itself faintly out of the darkness, he began to realize his position. There below him was the sea, there above shone the white buildings of the hotel—there, in fact, was the very balcony over which, in his fright, he had so madly leaped. He had come down on his head and had at once been rendered insensible, and his senseless body had begun to turn over and over in its rapid progress

down the steep face of the cliff to the wild waves lapping at its feet, for at that time it was nearly high water. But about two-thirds of the way down his body had been caught by two projecting boulders, and there held, and there it was now. The box for which he had risked so much had been dashed from his arms in the fall, and, rolling down the cliff, had doubtless been carried far out to sea by the refluent tide.

Van Duren did not know—he never knew—that the people of the hotel, urged on by Ambrose Murray after his return to consciousness, had come out with lanterns to search for him, but without much expectation of being able to find him. They knew well what a little chance of life anyone would have who leaped over that balcony, either by day or night. Had the tide been out, they would have gone down to the sands, in the full expectation of finding the stranger's body at the foot of the cliff. But the tide was up at the time, and, if not killed by the fall, Van Duren

would undoubtedly be drowned and his body carried out to sea. It seemed useless to make any prolonged search, and they quickly took themselves and their lanterns indoors.

As daylight advanced, the necessity of getting away from so dangerously prominent a position to some place of shelter and security impressed itself with increasing force on Van Duren's attention. Besides which, he was the prey to a burning thirst. When he began to move, it seemed as if every bone in his body were bruised—but move he must. There was now a broad stretch of brown sand at the foot of the cliff. If he could only reach that, he could manage to crawl along it, and so, in time, reach the inn where he had taken shelter yesterday. He was dreadfully weak and ill, but the effort must be made. He got down to the sands at last, but how he could not have told anyone—he hardly knew himself; and so, by about half-past six, he found himself once more in the shelter of the little inn.

To the landlord, his statement that while walking in the dark he had slipped over the edge of the cliff seemed by no means improbable. Such slips had happened before to strangers, and in more cases than one with fatal results. So his head was washed and strapped up, his clothes well brushed, and some breakfast put before him. He tried to eat but could not ; he could only drink. But while thus left alone for awhile he had to consider what his next step ought to be. It seemed by no means improbable that his enemies might come to the conclusion that he had lost his life through his mad leap from the balcony. In that case they would probably trouble themselves no further about him. But in so serious an affair it would not do to leave anything to chance. Now that their business at Marhyddoc was at an end, they would hasten back to London ; and it was just as likely as not that one of the first things they would do would be to obtain a warrant for his arrest, and send some one to Spur Alley in search of him. In such a case his only chance of

safety lay in being beforehand with his enemies. If he could only reach Spur Alley before them, he could possess himself of the money in the safe, and then, leaving Pringle in charge of the premises, seek some secure hiding place, and there await the progress of events. Even with a start of one or two days only, there were a good many things that he could turn into cash ; and, if the worst came to the worst, why there was that other world across the Atlantic, where energy and talent never fail to attain their meed of reward. To catch the next train back to London was evidently the first step that it behoved him to take. An hour later he was at the station.

As a slight measure of precaution, in case there should be any inquiry made after him at Marhyddoc, he took a ticket as far as Crewe only. Arrived at that station, it would be an easy matter for him to book to any point he liked. He had not been in the train more than five minutes before he fell into a deep sleep, and remembered nothing more till he was roused to give up

his ticket at Crewe. He got out of the carriage giddy, dazed—staggering like a man the worse for drink. He had evidently lost a great quantity of blood while lying exposed on the cliff. A cup of coffee and cognac revived him in some degree. He was determined to get forward to London at all risks, and he now rebooked to Euston. He was fortunate enough this time to get a compartment to himself. The giddiness in his head still continued, and to this was now added a strange, surging noise in his ears. When travelling in former days he had often amused himself by fancying that, underlying the roar and rattle of the train, there was a kind of rude articulate voice, and by trying to find out the words that the voice said to him. To-day he heard this voice clearly enough, and clearly enough he understood the two words that it said to him—that it kept on repeating, with a kind of rhythmic iteration, hundreds, nay, thousands of times—two words only, without change or variation: “Stop, murderer!” At first it was a relief when

the train halted for a minute or two at a station ; for a minute or two the voice ceased to stab him with a repetition of its dull, passionless cry. But by-and-by, to his previous torment there was added this other, that the moment the train came to a standstill at a station he heard voices, at first far away in the distance, then gradually coming nearer, the voices of men in pursuit, eager, full of menace, always crying aloud the same two words, "Stop, murderer !" He knew quite well, and it was a fact that he kept repeating to himself as earnestly as though he were striving to impress it upon some second person, that these voices were altogether imaginary—a delusion of his own weakened brain. But that did not prevent the illusion from growing on him to such an extent that, after a time, he found himself getting quite excited lest the train should not start again before the pursuing voices, growing momentarily louder, should come yelling on to the platform itself, and proclaim his terrible secret to the world at large.

What an everlasting journey it seemed to the poor, haunted wretch ! At length Willesden was reached, and there Van Duren alighted. There was some sort of vague idea floating in his brain that at every London terminus there might already be some one on the look-out for him, and he would not venture into Euston. He chose rather to make his way on foot through the starlit lanes—for it was dark again by this time—as far as Cricklewood. There he found a return cab, and into that he got and was driven to town.

In the streets of London, busy even at that late hour, there seemed shelter and protection for him. Here he was only one atom among four million others. What place could there be to hide in like London itself? He still heard the voices in the distance, but the roar and rattle of the streets partially drowned them. He discharged his cab at the corner of Eastcheap, and made his way towards Spur Alley on foot.

It was necessary to use most extreme caution in approaching his house. For aught he knew to the contrary, there might have been some one set to watch it already. For fully half an hour he lingered about it, without daring to go too near to it. There was no light in it visible from the street, except in Bakewell's underground kitchen. Everything looked as quiet, dark, and secure as usual. Suddenly a happy thought struck him. He knew the tavern that Pringle was in the habit of frequenting. Perhaps Pringle was there now. It was worth while to go and see. From his clerk he could at once learn whether any particular inquiries had been made after him during his absence.

Jonas Pringle, in the act of conveying a glass of hot rum-and-water to his mouth, had never been more startled in his life than he was when his eyes met those of Max Van Duren staring fixedly at him through the glass door of the tavern. He put down his glass untasted, and for a moment or two he thought that his master

was dead, and that he had seen his ghost. But presently the face appeared again, and beckoned him to go out into the street. Then, when he had got outside under the gaslight, he saw that it was indeed his master, but terribly changed. Half a dozen eager questions satisfied Van Duren that no particular inquiry had been made after him, and that Pringle knew nothing. It was hardly likely, at so late an hour of the night, that anyone would come and ask for him. He might utilise the next few hours in making his preparations and getting clear away. So Pringle was sent first to open the door, and then, two minutes later, Van Duren slid in like a shadow, and heard, with a sigh of relief, the heavy door locked and bolted behind him. For a few hours to come there would be rest and safety.

He said nothing to Pringle explanatory of his sudden appearance, or of the condition in which he was—unshaven, haggard, and with a great wound on one side of his head. He flung himself on to a couch, and told Pringle to lower the gas and order

some coffee. He hardly seemed to hear his clerk's explanation that the Bakewells had gone out for a holiday, but that he, Pringle, would make him some coffee. Five minutes later, when Pringle came to ask him whether he would not like some toast with his coffee, he was fast asleep on the sofa.

Pringle went back to his coffee-making, chuckling to himself, "What a fool he was to come in search of me, if he only knew ! What a fool he is to let me make his coffee for him ! Why shouldn't I put a dose of poison in it ? That wouldn't be such a bad sort of revenge ; and if I hadn't decided on something different, I might perhaps have adopted it. He looks half crazy to-night. Something queer has happened to him while he's been away. How did he come by that gash in his head ? But all that matters nothing to me. It only matters to me that he's here, under this roof, in my power. Better, far better for him had he never set foot across this threshold again !"

He was wide awake when Pringle took

in the coffee. "This is kind of you, Pringle," he said, and he began to drink it eagerly.

"I find that I shall have to leave home again the first thing in the morning," he said. "I shall sit up a great part of the night arranging matters, as I may have to go away for some considerable time. You, however, may go to bed. I will call you about six, and will then give you all needful instructions before going away."

Pringle nodded his usual careless good-night, and went. But instead of going upstairs to the room he usually occupied, he took off his shoes and stole down to the basement floor. He had put out the kitchen gas before taking up the coffee, but a few embers still glowed in the grate.

In the passage that led from the foot of the stairs to the strong-room there was still a faint glimmer of gas, as there was in the strong-room itself, in which the gas was seldom turned entirely off. The safe was locked as usual, and seemed never to

have been touched since Van Duren left home.

"He's nearly sure to come down here some time in the night, and here I'll wait for him," muttered Pringle to himself.

He groped about in the dark till he had found Bakewell's easy-chair, in which he established himself comfortably in front of the fire, with his feet on another chair, and there in the dark he waited. He could hear Van Duren moving about occasionally, and two or three times he seemed to pace the room for several minutes. The fire slowly burnt itself out, the crickets chirped loudly in the silence, the city clocks clanged out the hours one after one, some lightly and carelessly as it seemed, others solemnly and slowly, as though warning all who might hear them that they were another hour nearer eternity. Still Jonas Pringle sat waiting, nor ever closed an eye.

At length, about three o'clock of the early summer morning, he heard footsteps slowly descending the stone stairs, and he knew that the occasion for which he had

waited so long had come at last. The kitchen door was shut, but not latched, so that he could hear but not see anything that might happen outside. The footsteps came slowly and deliberately downstairs, and then went along the passage towards the strong-room. Then Pringle, listening intently, heard the bolts of the great iron door shoot back as the key was turned, and next moment he knew that Max Van Duren had entered the strong-room. He was still without his shoes, and rising from his seat he stepped noiselessly across the floor, and opening the door a little way, looked out. There was still the same faint glimmer of light in the passage, but the brighter glare that issued through the open door of the strong-room showed that Van Duren had turned up the gas inside. As quietly and stealthily as a tiger creeps on its prey, Pringle stole along the passage, and only paused when he reached the fringe of stronger light that issued from the room.

There, with his back towards him, stood

Max Van Duren, peering into the open safe, some of the contents of which were already scattered on the floor. For a few seconds—while a clock might tick twenty times—he stood watching him with a devilish sneer on his face. Suddenly Van Duren turned, and his eyes met the eyes of Pringle. An exclamation of surprise burst from his lips; but before he had time to stir from the place where he was standing, Pringle had dashed forward, had seized the handle of the door, had pulled it to with all his might, and had turned the key. Max Van Duren was locked up in his own strong-room, ten feet below the surface of the earth.

“Caged at last!” muttered Pringle to himself, as he drew out the key and put it in his pocket. “Past three o’clock: it will be broad daylight soon. I think I could relish some breakfast. Pity old Mother Bakewell isn’t here to get it ready for me.” Whistling a tune under his breath, he went back into the kitchen, flung open the shutters, and began to set about lighting a fire.

"Shall I have those two eggs boiled or poached?" he asked himself, as he prepared a foundation of firewood and paper. "I think I'll have 'em poached, just for variety. I'm sick of boiled eggs."

Van Duren had not been silent all this time. "Pringle! what devil's trick is this?" were his first words as he sprang at the closing door. "Pringle, Pringle, I say, you have fastened me in! Open the door, you fool, or it will be worse for you!" But Pringle was in the kitchen, cutting the string of a bundle of firewood.

"Come, now, Pringle, my good fellow, a joke's a joke, as everybody knows, but I've had enough of this. If you only knew how important is the business I've got to attend to, you wouldn't keep me here, I know." Pringle by this time was down on his knees, blowing away at the blaze like a pair of wheezy bellows.

"What do you want of me? What's your grudge against me?" cried Van Duren, behind the iron door. "Do you want an advance of salary? You shall have it.

Twenty pounds a year advance. Do you hear that? Twenty pounds a year. If that's not enough—thirty. Only open the door, and I promise you fifty. Think of that—fifty pounds a year advance!" Still no answer, though he could plainly hear the rattle of crockery, as Pringle proceeded to set out the breakfast-tray. "Come, now, Pringle, we've had enough of this tomfoolery. I'd like to join you over breakfast. I want to tell you my plans. I want to talk things over with you before I go. Open the door, there's a good fellow."

The only notice Pringle took of this appeal was to turn the gas three parts off at the meter, the effect of which was to reduce the jet in the strong-room to a mere point of flame, and so leave Van Duren in almost total darkness. "One had need be economical in these days," muttered Pringle to himself. "Gas is very expensive."

For a few moments Van Duren was silent. It might be that he began to despair, that he began to see how useless any further appeals would be, that it began

to dawn on his mind what Pringle's purpose really was. But in a little while he spoke again. "Pringle, Pringle, I say, where are you? What have I done to you that you should serve me like this? Fiend—monster—bloodthirsty villain! If you want to get rid of me, knock me on the head and have done with it. Don't leave me here to starve. That is too horrible!"

"These eggs are hardly as fresh as they might be, for all I gave twopence each for 'em," muttered Pringle! "But that's the worst of London eggs—you never can depend on 'em." Then he made himself some toast, taking care not to spare the butter, and presently everything was ready for him to begin. "I like my coffee made ally Frongsey," he said, contemplatively. "It's certainly an improvement on the old English style. Those Frenchmen don't know a great deal, but they do know how to make coffee."

When everything was ready for him to sit down to, he walked along the passage to the iron door and rapped at it with his

knuckles. “Max Van Duren, are you there?” he said, simply and sternly.

Van Duren, who had been silent for some little while, responded eagerly. “Yes, yes, Pringle, I am here! I knew it was only one of your queer practical jokes.”

“I am now going to get my breakfast, after which I shall smoke a pipe. When I have finished my pipe, I will come and have some talk with you. Till then you may as well be silent, and behave like a reasonable being.” With that he turned on his heel.

“Pringle, my good fellow, don’t leave me here all that time; don’t leave me here in the dark in this horrible den!” But Pringle was gone already, and this time he shut behind him the wooden door at the foot of the stairs that opened into the passage, and then he shut the kitchen door, so as to ensure himself still further against being disturbed; then he rubbed his hands with an air of enjoyment, and proceeded to pour out his coffee.

He took half an hour for his breakfast,

and another half-hour for the pipe that followed, and then he told himself that he was ready for business. All this time the prisoner in the strong-room had maintained the most perfect silence.

Opening the outer door, Pringle traversed the passage, and, as before, rapped with his knuckles on the inner door. As before, he said, "Max Van Duren, are you there?"

"I am here."

"Then listen; come closer to the door and listen. You would doubtless like to know why I have shut you up here. That is what I am going to tell you. But first you must answer me one or two questions. Do you know the village of Dunhope, in Berkshire?"

No answer.

Pringle repeated the question with more emphasis. "If you won't answer my questions, I can't tell you what you are so anxious to know."

"I did know a place of that name some years ago."

"Just so. You knew it some years ago.

If we were to say seven or eight years ago, we should not be very wide of the mark. Knowing Dunhope so well, you perhaps knew a young girl who lived there once on a time—a girl whose name was Jessie Ember. Eh ! am I right or wrong ?”

“ You are right ; I did know a girl of that name.”

“ We are getting on famously. A little bird has whispered to me that you made love to this girl, that you persuaded her to leave her situation, and that, relying on your solemn promise to make her your wife, you brought her to London ; but that when you had once got her here, you quite forgot your promise to marry her. Are these things true, or are they not ?”

There was a long pause. Then came the answer, with a sort of groan—

“ They are true.”

“ Soon tiring of the girl, you turned her adrift to starve or die, or—or to become one of earth’s forlornest creatures ; it mattered not to you.”

He paused, overcome by an emotion that,

despite all his efforts, would not be wholly suppressed.

“Am I not right?” he asked, a moment or two later. “Have you ever, from that day to this, troubled yourself to make one single inquiry after the girl whom you once swore that you loved better than life itself? Do you even know whether she is dead or alive?”

“Who are you that you talk to me in this way? By what right do you ask me these questions?”

“Who am I? I will tell you who I am. I am Jessie Ember’s father! Who has more right to question you than I?”

“You her father! Oh, Heaven!”

It was little more than a whisper, that seemed instinct with surprise, terror, and anguish.

“Scoundrel! unmitigated scoundrel!” began Pringle. Then he paused. “But I only demean myself by calling you names. You are where you are—and I am satisfied.”

“What do you want of me? I am rich, and——”

“ Singular, isn’t it, that I should have been with you all this time, and never have discovered till the other day that you are the man I have been looking for for years? But things do come about strangely in this world.”

“ Unlock the door, and I will make you rich for life.”

“ Ha! ha! I can be rich for life without unlocking the door.”

“ How?”

“ By waiting till you are dead, and then constituting myself your heir. No will required. No legacy duty to pay. Funeral expenses next to nothing. I saw such a splendid grey rat leap from behind the old ledgers the other day.”

“ Villain! you would not murder me?”

“ Murder you! Ha! ha! Certainly not. What put that idea into your head.”

“ Then why don’t you open the door?”

“ Now you are asking a leetle too much —just a leetle. I would do anything in the world for you except open this door. You know you robbed me of my child—you

ruined her and deserted her. It was only one of your little practical jokes. It's my turn now. This is one of *my* jokes. You don't object, I hope?"

"Then you are going to leave me here to starve—to die?"

"Oh no, I'm not going to leave you. There you are mistaken. I shall come a dozen times a day to see you. These little dialogues are interesting. I'll bring my pipe after awhile, and come and keep you company; but on this side the door, you know—on this side the door."

"Have you no pity? Will nothing move you?"

"It will be quite a little holiday for you. Nothing to do—absolutely nothing to do. I will do all the business, attend to the letters, and answer all inquiries. 'Has Mr. Van Duren got back home yet?' 'No, sir, he is still in France, but I am expecting him every day.' Ha! ha! and you here all the time! Won't it be a lark, Van, my boy, eh?"

A deep groan was the only reply.

“And now I’m just going round the corner in search of an early nip to digest my breakfast. Don’t get down-hearted, because I shan’t be long away. No, no, I value you too much to stay away from you for very long.”

And, turning on his heel, Jonas Pringle walked leisurely away, whistling to himself as he went.



CHAPTER X.

TOLD AT LAST.

LIVE DEANE had taken her leave of Lady Dudgeon and was crossing the hall towards the side door, close to which the fly that had brought her from Pembridge was still waiting, when suddenly the doors at the opposite side of the hall were opened, and, as they swung back on their hinges, a sight met her eyes that for a moment or two seemed to turn her to stone.

Supported on one side by Dr. Whitaker, and resting his other arm on the shoulder

of Pod Piper, like a man newly risen from the tomb, Matthew Kelvin stepped slowly and painfully across the threshold. His thin, bent form, his long, bony fingers, the worn, hollow face, the pinched nostrils, the deep-sunk eyes, and the grave-like pallor that overspread his features, made up a figure that looked far more weird and startling when seen thus in the full glare of day than in the semi-obscurity and amid the appropriate surroundings of a sick room.

A strange, fierce light sprang to the sick man's eyes the moment he saw who was standing there. Olive's cheek whitened as she looked, her breath came more quickly, she pressed her hand involuntarily to her heart, as though she were in pain ; then she went two or three steps nearer, and then she halted again, as though in doubt or fear.

“ Matthew ! You here !” she said at last.

“ So you are not gone yet !” was the answer. “ It is well. I have something to say to you. Follow me.”

Then the ghastly procession began to move slowly forward again, and, preceded by one of the baronet's servants, it crossed the hall and went in the direction of the library.

Olive stood aside to let it pass—stood aside with clasped hands, and with her heart on her lips, as it were, longing, yearning for one word, one look of kindness or recognition from her cousin, but in vain. Matthew Kelvin's eyes were set straight before him, and he looked neither to the right hand nor the left, till he reached the library, where the servant at once wheeled forward a large easy chair, into which he sank, breathless and exhausted.

Olive, following silently behind, was the last to enter the room. She shut the door behind her, and stood quietly in the back-ground, unheeded for the time by every one. Vague, dark forebodings were at work in her heart. What did it all mean? she asked herself again and again. That strange look in her cousin's eyes, the way he spoke to her, the presence of Dr. Whit-

aker—all signs and tokens of something that boded no good to her. Had everything been discovered? She shivered from head to foot as this question put itself to her.

As soon as Mr. Kelvin was seated, the servant and Pod Piper left the room.

“Why, bless my heart! is that you or your ghost?” cried Sir Thomas, starting up from his chair and rubbing his eyes.

He had been taking forty winks surreptitiously—a little weakness in which he indulged three or four times a day, without ever permitting himself to acknowledge that he had been asleep.

Gerald, in the act of reaching a book from one of the upper shelves, turned with the volume in his hand as Kelvin and the others came into the room.

“He will be better in a little while,” said Dr. Whitaker to the baronet, who had crossed the room, and was now standing, with his hands under his coat-tails and pursed-up lips, gazing down with compas-

sionate eyes at the half-conscious man before him.

“What a wreck! What a terrible wreck!” murmured the baronet. “I—I never dreamt that he was half as bad as this.”

Dr. Whitaker put something to the sick man’s nostrils, which he inhaled eagerly, and presently he began to revive.

“I trust, Sir Thomas, that you will pardon my intrusion,” he said, at last, speaking in a strange, husky voice, that was little more than a whisper, and was totally unlike the well-remembered voice—clear and confident—of Matthew Kelvin. “That my business here is of a very pressing kind you may well believe, when you see me thus and so attended.”

“Whatever your business may be, Kelvin,” said the baronet, kindly, “it is almost a pity that you did not put it off till you were a little stronger, or else that you did not send for me. I would have gone to see you willingly. You know that.”

“Yes, yes; I know all you can say,” said

Kelvin, a little querulously. “But it was necessary that I should come here in person, and without an hour’s delay.”

“You don’t mean to say that there’s going to be a dissolution of Parliament?” cried Sir Thomas, eagerly.

Kelvin, smiling faintly, shook his head.

“Ah! I was afraid there was no such luck,” said the baronet.

“I am here on the same errand that brought Miss Deane here this morning.”

“But Miss Deane has told us everything, and a queer story it is.”

“She has *not* told you everything, Sir Thomas.”

“Well, I hope there’s not much more to tell. I hardly know already whether I’m topsy-turvey or how.”

“You have, I presume, read the letter that I sent by Miss Deane?”

“Miss Deane gave me no letter. She told me a long rigmarole about——”

“Oh, Matthew! I lost the letter!” cried Olive, coming a step or two nearer. “I lost the letter; but I knew what you

had written, and I delivered your message just the same."

"You could not know what I had written, unless you had read my letter," said Kelvin, coldly and sternly.

"Oh, Matthew! Why do you say such cruel things of me?" cried Olive, imploringly. "You know how I knew what the contents of your letter would necessarily be."

"Has the message which Miss Deane gave you been given also to Lady Dudgeon and to Miss Lloyd?" asked Kelvin of the baronet.

"Certainly—to both of them. They were told first of all."

"I hope you will not think that I am asking too much if I ask you to be kind enough to request the favour of Lady Dudgeon's and Miss Lloyd's presence here for a few minutes."

"We'll have them here in a brace of jiffeys," said Sir Thomas, heartily.

Gerald rang the bell, a servant came in, and a message was sent to Lady Dudgeon and Miss Lloyd.

"I felt sure there was some mistake in that queer story which Miss Deane told us a couple of hours ago," said the baronet, cheerfully. "Such things never happen in real life, you know. One sees them on the stage sometimes, and laughs at them."

Nobody answered him, and he began to whistle under his breath.

Dr. Whitaker was busy giving his patient a cordial, which he had taken the precaution to bring with him in his pocket.

A minute later, Lady Dudgeon and Miss Lloyd entered the room.

"I suppose I ought to make myself scarce, but I shan't," said Gerald to himself. "I shall not leave the room unless they tell me to go. The climax is on us at last, and I think it will be found presently that I've as much right here as anybody. Besides, my darling may want me to back her up."

He dropped quietly into a chair in the background. Only one person there seemed to be aware of his presence. Who that person was need hardly be said.

Lady Dudgeon was genuinely shocked to see Mr. Kelvin looking so ill, and chided him gently for venturing so far from home. Eleanor went up to him, and shook hands with him. He saw the tears standing in her eyes, and his own eyes fell before her. Love and remorse were busy in his heart.

“How bitterly I have wronged her!” he groaned to himself. “What a confession is this which I am here to make!”

“The letter which I wrote this morning,” began Mr. Kelvin, struggling manfully with his weakness, “and which, by some strange mischance, appears to have been lost, was addressed to Miss Lloyd. It would appear, however, that my cousin, Olive Deane, who was certainly cognisant of most of the circumstances of the case, has told you what were the contents of the letter. There are certain other circumstances, however, of which as yet you know nothing, and it is of these that I am now here to speak.”

He paused for a moment or two to gather

breath, and to moisten his lips again with the cordial.

“I presume Miss Deane has told you,” he went on, “that while recently wading through some of the late Mr. Lloyd’s papers, I came across certain documents which prove conclusively that Miss Lloyd is only that gentleman’s adopted daughter, and that, consequently, there being no will, she is not the heiress to his property. Is not that, may I ask, what Miss Deane has told you?”

“That is precisely what Miss Deane told us,” said Lady Dudgeon; “and I hope, with all my heart, that you are now come to tell us that it’s all a mistake, and that our dear Eleanor is Miss Lloyd after all.”

“Hear, hear!” cried Sir Thomas, as if from the back benches of the House.

“I am sorry to say that what Miss Deane told you is perfectly true,” said Kelvin. “There is no possibility of mistake as to the main facts of the case.”

“Dear, dear! what a pity—what a very great pity!” interposed the baronet.

“ You may remember, Sir Thomas,” resumed Kelvin, “ that some little time after Mr. Lloyd’s death, I once or twice mentioned to you that amongst his papers I had not been able to find any clue as to where Miss Lloyd was either born or baptized. It was requisite, before taking out letters of administration, that I should have some trustworthy information on this point ; but there being no particular hurry in the matter, and I being busy at the time with other important work, one week went on after another without my making any serious effort to supply the necessary link. Still, when the discovery did come, it was as great a surprise to me as it can possibly have been to any of you.”

“ Then you think there is not the slightest possibility of there being any mistake in the matter ?” said her ladyship.

“ I have in my possession a document, written and signed by Jacob Lloyd himself, in which he states that the young lady, supposed to be his daughter, was merely

adopted by himself and his wife in her infancy."

"Is no clue given as to her real parentage?"

"None whatever. But I have also in my possession a sealed packet which I will presently give to Miss Lloyd—a packet addressed to her by Mr. Lloyd himself, but with instructions that it should not be given to her till after his death. Inside this packet I think it quite possible that Miss Lloyd may find all the particulars she would like to know."

"Does it not seem somewhat strange, Mr. Kelvin," said Lady Dudgeon, "that after bringing up Eleanor as his own child, Mr. Lloyd should have left her totally unprovided for?"

"I think there can be no doubt, madam, as to Mr. Lloyd's intentions. That he intended to provide handsomely for his adopted daughter, no one who knew him could doubt. But he was a very dilatory man in many ways, and he put off making his will from day to day and year to year,

till at length death surprised him suddenly, and no time was given him to repair his fatal omission."

There was a pause. Dr. Whitaker whispered something in his patient's ear, but Kelvin only shook his head impatiently.

"You remarked just now, Mr. Kelvin," said Lady Dudgeon, "that there were some other circumstances connected with this remarkable case which you thought it desirable that we should become acquainted with."

"Precisely so, madam. It is for that purpose that I am here. The revelation I am about to make is a very painful one—very painful and humiliating to me. But I have made up my mind to make it, and I will not shrink from doing so whatever may be the consequences to myself."

Once more he paused and put the cordial to his lips. That he was deeply moved, all there could plainly see, but Olive Deane alone was in a position to guess the cause.

“This is the confession that I have to make,” he began at last. “The news you have heard to-day respecting Miss Lloyd, has been in my possession not for a few days only, as you probably imagine, but for five long months.”

“Oh, Mr. Kelvin!” cried Eleanor.

“Dear me, Mr. Kelvin, what a very strange person you must be!” cried her ladyship. “Are we to understand that this secret has been in your possession for five months, and that you have never spoken of it till now?”

“That is what I wish your ladyship to understand.”

“But what could your motive possibly be for keeping a piece of information of that kind to yourself for so long a time?”

“I will tell you what my motive was—tell you all. Eighteen months ago I made Miss Lloyd an offer of marriage.”

“Bless my heart! now who would have thought that?” cried Sir Thomas.

“Miss Lloyd rejected me. Six months later I tried my fortune again, but with no

better result. It seemed to me—but I may have been mistaken—that in the second rejection there was an amount of disdain, of—of contempt almost—that stung me to the quick, and I vowed that if the opportunity were ever given me I would be revenged.”

“Oh, Mr. Kelvin, how you misunderstood me—misread me !”

“To seek revenge on a woman because she rejected you! That was very despicable, Mr. Kelvin.” This from her ladyship.

“I know it and feel it now. I did not know it or feel it at the time. My mind must have been warped by its own bitterness. So when an opportunity came, as I thought it had come when this secret respecting Miss Lloyd found its way into my keeping, I did not fail to seize it.”

“And I certainly fail to see in what way the keeping to yourself of this information respecting Miss Lloyd could avenge a fancied slight in times gone by.”

“There stands the temptress”—pointing

to Olive Deane—"who first suggested the idea to me. She—she it was who said to me, 'By keeping back the information that has come into your possession so strangely, till Miss Lloyd has become accustomed to her new position, till a life of ease and self-indulgence shall have become, as it were, a second nature to her, till she has learned to love—perhaps till her wedding morn itself—then will her fall from wealth to poverty seem infinitely greater than it would do now: then will yours be a revenge worthy of the name !'"

All eyes were turned on Olive Deane, who was still standing in the background not far from the door. Her eyes were bent on the carpet and her face was deathly pale. Suddenly she lifted her eyes and flashed back a look of scorn, that took in every one there except her cousin; a bitter smile curled her thin lips for a moment, then she drew a chair forward and sat down without a word. No one spoke.

"I am telling you this," resumed Kelvin, "not as blaming my cousin for her sug-

gestion, but as a confession of my own weakness and wretched folly. That my feelings were very bitter against Miss Lloyd, I need hardly tell you, and yet how I despised myself for doing as I was doing, no one but myself can ever know. Not once, but a hundred times, did I vow to myself that I would write to Miss Lloyd and tell her everything, and a hundred times the recollection of her look and her words when she rejected me, came to my mind and held me back. Then came my illness, which lasted so long that I began to fancy I should never get better again, but all through it the wrong that I had done Miss Lloyd lay with a terrible weight on my conscience, and the first day that I was strong enough to hold a pen I wrote to her that letter which she ought to have received this morning."

"All this was very, very wrong of you, Mr. Kelvin," said Lady Dudgeon. "Unfortunately, however, none of us can undo the past, and I am quite sure that in this case your own conscience will be your severest punishment. Miss Deane said

something about a nephew of the late Mr. Lloyd being the real heir."

"Yes, a certain Mr. Gerald Warburton. Now that I have broken the news to Miss Lloyd, it will be my duty at once to communicate with Mr. Warburton—though, strange to say, I discovered for the first time this morning that he had already written to me during my illness, but that the letter had been purposely withheld from me." He looked steadily at Olive as he said these words, but whatever her feelings might be at learning that he had somehow discovered her treachery with regard to Warburton's letters, she still kept her eyes fixed stedfastly on the carpet, and gave him no answering look.

"And now, Miss Lloyd," resumed the lawyer, "I will give into your hands that packet which I ought to have placed there five months ago. I dare not ask you to forgive me for the wrong I have done you. Such forgiveness would be an excess of generosity such as I have no right to expect."

He took a small sealed packet from his pocket. Then he stood up and, weak as he was, would have walked across the room to Eleanor, but she crossed the floor hurriedly and took the packet from his hands.

“ Oh, Mr. Kelvin, I forgive you fully and willingly !” she said with emotion. “ Pray, pray do not let the thought of what is past ever distress you again !”

Then, when she saw that the packet was addressed to her in the handwriting that she remembered so well, she kissed it with tears in her eyes and went slowly back to her seat by Lady Dudgeon.

“ Unfortunately, Sir Thomas,” resumed Kelvin, “ my confessions are not yet at an end, and I must crave your attention for a few minutes longer.”

“ No apologies are needed, Kelvin—none whatever,” said Sir Thomas. “ I am entirely at your service.”

Kelvin bowed.

“ At my recommendation, Sir Thomas,” he said, “ you, a little while ago, took into

your service the gentleman who is now sitting there.”

“Pomeroy, you mean. To be sure—to be sure. And a very useful fellow I’ve found him. I’m your debtor for recommending him to me, Kelvin.”

“When I asked you to take him into your service, sir, I did not know one thing about him that I know now.”

“Ay—ay—what is that? Can’t know anything bad of Pomeroy. Good fellow, very.”

“My dear! such remarks may be a little premature,” interposed her ladyship gently.

“From something that came to my knowledge only a few hours ago, I have discovered that Mr. Pomeroy’s chief motive in desiring to enter your service, was that he might have an opportunity of being near Miss Lloyd, and of thereby winning her affections and inducing her to become his wife.”

“Bless my heart! I would never have believed that of Pomeroy—never!”

Again Kelvin looked fixedly at Olive but

she still kept her eyes turned persistently from him. She was stupefied. How had all this knowledge come to him—first the knowledge of Gerald Warburton's letter, and now of the secret arrangement between Pomeroy and herself? Had that still darker secret come to his knowledge likewise?

“I can only apologise, Sir Thomas,” resumed Kelvin, “for having inadvertently been the means of introducing, under your roof, a person whose designs were such as I have mentioned, and I trust——”

“You are not to blame, Kelvin—not in the least,” said the baronet. “But this is very sad—very sad indeed. What have you to say, Pomeroy, to all this?”

“Only that what Mr. Kelvin has just stated is, to a certain extent, true,” said Gerald coolly. “My inducement in seeking to enter your service was certainly the hope of being thereby brought into daily contact with Miss Lloyd, with whom I was specially desirous of becoming acquainted.”

“That is easily understood,” said her

ladyship. “Miss Lloyd at that time was supposed to be worth twenty thousand pounds. Mr. Pomeroy’s audacious candour is quite refreshing.”

“I will be candid,” said Gerald with an amused smile. “For me to see and become acquainted with Miss Lloyd was to love her, and when that fact became patent to me, it would not do to sail any longer under false colours. I told Miss Lloyd that I loved her—the confession slipped out one evening unawares—but the first time I met her afterwards I confessed to her what my reasons had been for entering this house, asking her at the same time to forgive the wrong I had done her, and to forget the words I had said. From that day to this Miss Lloyd and I have been good friends : nothing more.”

“Bless us all ! what goings on under one’s very nose, and I to know nothing about them !” cried Sir Thomas.

“But this morning altered the position of affairs entirely,” went on Gerald. “You, sir, a little while ago told me what Miss

Deane had just told you—that Miss Lloyd was Miss Lloyd no longer, and had nothing in the world but her own sweet self that she could call her own. This being the case, I at once sought Miss Lloyd—found her—told her that my love was still unchanged, and would not leave her till I had won from her a promise to become my wife. That promise I hold, and I shall claim its fulfilment from her before she and I are many weeks older."

"Well done, Pomeroy! That's manly—that's as it should be!" exclaimed Sir Thomas. "I knew you would turn out a decent fellow at bottom."

Her ladyship was slightly scandalised. "My dear!" she pleaded, "you are too enthusiastic. You let your heart run away with your head."

She drew her skirts round her, pushed back her chair a little, and perching her double eye-glass on the bridge of her high nose, she stared curiously at Eleanor.

Lady Dudgeon's feelings just now were of a very mixed kind. Her affection for the

girl, the growth of long years, struggled with her very natural vexation at finding how thoroughly she had been hoodwinked, how completely she had been ignored in the matter by everybody. On the other hand, there was a spice of romance about the affair that appealed to some hidden feeling, of whose existence she herself was hardly aware.

“Child! child!” she said in an aside to Eleanor, “if you had but given me your confidence! Two paupers! What are you to do? How are you to live? It’s dreadful to contemplate!”

Kelvin’s cheeks flushed as he listened to Gerald’s words. He set his teeth and glared savagely out of his hollow eyes at his successful rival. Was it for this that he had humiliated himself by his recent confession? What a fool he had been to acknowledge so much before all these people! This mere adventurer had carried away the prize for which he had striven so boldly and sacrificed so much. Bitter indeed were his thoughts just then. The

emotion was too much for his strength, and he fainted.

Olive was by his side in a moment, but Dr. Whitaker spoke sternly to her.

“Stand back, if you please,” he said. “I will attend to Mr. Kelvin.”

She flashed a look of hate and defiance at him. Her overwrought feelings could contain themselves no longer.

“I will not stand back,” she said, speaking in her clear incisive way. “Who has more right by my cousin’s side than I, who have nursed him through his long illness?”

Dr. Whitaker did not answer. He was trying to bring back his patient to consciousness. Olive sank down at her cousin’s knees, and took his cold hand in hers and pressed it to her lips.

In a little while Matthew Kelvin opened his eyes and looked feebly round, as if striving to bring to memory where he was, and whose were the faces that were bent over him. Last of all, his eyes met those of Olive Deane, and with a flash, as it were, everything came back to him. Then he

saw whose hand it was that was holding his. With a look of loathing and hate that almost killed the soul within her, he flung Olive's hand from him, and, trembling in every limb, he staggered to his feet.

“Poisoner!—begone! Quit my sight for ever!” he cried; and then he fell back into his chair.

As it were an echo, came the word “Poisoner!” from the lips of every one in the room. Olive, who had risen to her feet when her cousin flung away her hand, staggered back as if suddenly smitten.

Lady Dudgeon was the first to speak. “Surely, sir,” she said, addressing herself to Dr. Whitaker, “there must be some terrible mistake in all this! The accusation just made by your patient can hardly be that of a man in his proper senses.”

“I am afraid, madam,” said Dr. Whitaker, very gravely, “that the accusation made by Mr. Kelvin is but too well founded. We have it on evidence which cannot be disputed that my patient has been the victim of an elaborate system of slow poison-

ing. Suspicion points in one direction, and in one only: in the direction indicated by my patient himself."

"It seems altogether incredible," urged her ladyship. "What possible motive could Miss Deane have for attempting so dreadful a crime?"

"Let Miss Deane answer you herself," said Olive.

She was standing as she had stood from the moment when her cousin hurled at her that terrible word. Everything was lost: she knew it but too well, and she nerved herself for one last supreme effort.

"Lady Dudgeon is curious to know my motive for doing that which I am said to have done. Her curiosity shall be satisfied. My motive was my love for Matthew Kelvin. He loved me once, or I dreamt that he did. A passing fancy on his part, perhaps—soon forgotten by him, but never by me. I have never ceased to love him. I would give my life for him at this moment. When I found how persistently his heart was set on Miss Lloyd, I thought—foolishly

enough, no doubt—that if I could have him all to myself—if I could see him daily, hourly—if he were ill and I could nurse him—I might perhaps succeed in winning back the love which I could not believe had ever been wholly lost to me. He was taken ill, and I nursed him. But to think that I would have let him die—the man whom I loved with my whole heart and soul—is utterly absurd! I understood too well what I was about to fear any such catastrophe. I could bear to see him suffer, simply because I loved him so much, and wanted him so wholly and entirely to myself. But I would not have let him die. Your ladyship looks horrified. Be thankful, madam, that your affections move in a less erratic orbit—that yours is a heart whose equable pulsations could never be quickened as mine have been. But I—I was not born in the frigid zone. Love to me is existence itself—for what is life without love?"

"What a dreadful person! We might all have been murdered in our beds!" said

Lady Dudgeon in a loud aside, as she felt in her pocket for her smelling-salts.

“Matthew!” said Olive, passionately, advancing a step nearer her cousin, “you have bid me begone, and I know that there is nothing left for me but to obey. All is over between us. I played for a heavy stake, and I have lost it. I leave you now, never to see you again. I go forth into the world—whither, I neither know nor care. Listen to these my last words—listen, and believe. I would shed my heart’s blood for you. Had you died through me, I would have killed myself an hour afterwards. I never loved you more than at this moment. That love I shall carry with me. Nothing can deprive me of it. Time will soften the hardness of your judgment. Then sometimes you may think of me with a touch of the old kindness, and say to yourself, ‘Her greatest fault was that she loved me not wisely, but too well.’”

Still keeping her eyes fixed on her cousin, but vouchsafing no glance to any one else, she moved slowly towards the door. She

reached the threshold, and there for a moment she paused.

“Farewell, Matthew! farewell for ever!” she said; and her voice had a ring of pathos and despair in it that her hearers never forgot. Then she drew her veil over her face, and the next moment she was gone.



CHAPTER XI.

“AND YOU SHALL STILL BE LADY CLARE.”

CN leaving the library after the scene with Olive Deane, Gerald had whispered to Eleanor: “Don’t open the sealed packet till you have seen me again. I shall be in the conservatory half an hour after luncheon.”

To the conservatory Eleanor went at the time specified, taking the sealed packet with her, and there she found Gerald awaiting her arrival. There was a bright, happy look in his eyes, such as she had not seen in them since that never-to-be-forgotten evening when he first took her in

his arms and told her that he loved her. He came to meet her as soon as she opened the door, took both her hands in his, kissed her, and led her to a seat where they would be safe from interruption.

Eleanor did not feel at all like a young lady on whom fickle Fortune had been playing one of her strangest practical jokes ; she did not feel a bit like the genteel pauper Lady Dudgeon had called her : she felt very, very happy. It was wrong of her to feel so—very wrong ; but she could not help it.

“ I dare say you thought my request a very singular one,” said Gerald, as he sat down beside her, “ but you will hear something still more singular before the day is over.”

“ This has been a day of surprises,” answered Eleanor. “ It seems like twenty years since yesterday.”

“ It will seem like twice twenty when you shall have heard all that I have to tell you.”

He looked into her eyes, and in their

shrinking depths he seemed to read a question which she was afraid to put into words : “Are you going to tell me that you love me no longer ?”

A kiss—or it may be half-a-dozen, for in such cases one soon loses count—did something towards reassuring her.

“I asked you not to open the sealed packet till you had seen me again, because I thought it better that I should first tell you a certain strange story, of which as yet you know nothing, and so prepare your mind for what you will find there when you come to open it.”

“But—but how is it possible that you can know anything as to the contents of the sealed packet ?”

“It is quite possible, as you shall presently hear,” answered Gerald, with a smile. “But before I go any further, I want you to promise me one thing.”

“Only one ! I think I may promise that. But tell me what it is.”

“Simply this. That nothing I may tell you this afternoon will be allowed in any

way to prejudice the promise which you gave me this morning."

"The promise which you stole, you mean."

"Well, then, the promise which I stole. But since you put the case in that way, I must change my request into a warning. Take notice, that I, John Pomeroy, do hereby warn you, Eleanor Lloyd, that whatever I may have to tell you to-day notwithstanding, I shall consider you bound in honour to fulfil and carry out a certain promise which, whether it was stolen from you or given of your own free will, is none the less a promise, and binding on your conscience as such. I cannot just now call to mind the particular Act of Parliament applicable in such cases, but I have no doubt that there is one. Consider yourself, therefore, as having been properly warned."

"And now, sir, may I ask of what strange, eventful history all this may be looked on as the prologue?"

Her lip quivered a little as she asked this question. She was beginning to fear

she knew not what. Involuntarily her fingers closed more tightly on the hand that was still holding hers. The close contact seemed to give her strength. "What need I fear now I know that he loves me?" she asked herself; and her heart whispered back—"Nothing."

"A strange, eventful history, indeed," said Gerald; "so strange, that I hardly know how to begin it."

His tone was grave enough now. He was, in truth, puzzled how and where to begin his revelations.

"Once on a time," he said, at last—"that is to say, some five or six months ago—I was living very quietly in a little town in the south of France, when, one fine morning, I was summoned post haste to London. A certain lady, an old friend of yours, Miss Bellamy by name, was the person whose imperative summons I felt bound to obey."

"Do you know Miss Bellamy?" asked Eleanor, opening her eyes very wide indeed.

“Miss Bellamy used to buy me sweets when I was a very small shaver indeed. In fact, there is a legend current that she assisted at the cutting of my first tooth.”

“But why did she send for you all the way from France?”

“Some seven weeks previously, she had sent through the post, to Mr. Kelvin at Pembridge, the very sealed packet about which so much has been said to-day. That packet had been placed by Mr. Lloyd in her hands many years before, with a request that she would keep it carefully by her till after his decease. When that event took place, Miss Bellamy was at Guernsey, and six months elapsed before the packet reached the hands of Mr. Kelvin. Immediately on receipt of it, his duty was to communicate to you those facts of which you were allowed to remain in ignorance till this morning. Finding, after a lapse of several weeks, that Mr. Kelvin had done nothing in the affair, Miss Bellamy sent for me, and asked me to go down to Pembridge, and ascertain from Kelvin the reason of his unaccountable in-

action. I went down to Pembridge and saw Kelvin—whom I had once met years previously; but, singular as it may seem, I said nothing to him of the one particular object that had taken me there. At that time Olive Deane was living with her cousin, and it was suggested by her that, as Sir Thomas Dudgeon happened to be in want of a secretary, the place might perhaps be one that would suit me. She suggested, too, that I, being a poor man, might improve my fortunes by marrying an heiress, the heiress in question being Miss Eleanor Lloyd. For reasons of my own, I appeared to fall in with her views. The situation was procured for me, and I made my appearance at Stammars.

“One of my reasons for acting thus was my desire to see and be near you. I had heard a great deal about you at different times, and I wanted to make your acquaintance, and judge you for myself before letting you know that I was in any way mixed up with your private affairs. I wanted, in fact, to meet you as an utter stranger.”

“Before you go any further,” said Eleanor, “I should like to ask you one question. When you first came down to Pembridge, did you know that I was not Mr. Lloyd’s daughter, and, consequently, not entitled to his property?”

“I did know it.”

“Then it was very wrong of you to let me live on in ignorance of my real position. You were making yourself the accomplice of Mr. Kelvin.”

“Granted. But I had very special reasons for acting as I did. I suspected the existence of some plot or scheme against you which I was desirous of fathoming. Besides, I could not find in my heart to be the one to strike the cruel blow that would deprive you of name and fortune, and shake the very foundations of your life.”

“The cruelty lay in not telling me. You did me a great injustice, and, at the same time, you deeply wronged Mr. Warburton, the real heir.”

“Oh, if Mr. Warburton’s anything like

a decent sort of fellow, he won't mind a bit when it's all explained to him," said Gerald, with a twinkle in his eye.

Eleanor looked excessively pained. "You talk so strangely," she said in a faltering voice, "that I hardly understand you."

Gerald's arm went round her waist, and before she could offer any resistance half a score kisses had been rained on her cheeks.

"Oh! my darling," he cried, "cannot you see through it? Cannot you understand it all? I—I am Gerald Warburton!"

"You Gerald Warburton!" she said, as if repeating the words mechanically after him, but without comprehending what they meant. She put his arm aside, and stood up and stared into his face, as she might have stared had she been walking in her sleep, and were now coming back to consciousness.

"You Gerald Warburton!"

He drew her down gently on to the seat again, and made one of her hands a prisoner in his.

"It is even as I have told you," he said.

“ It was I who Miss Bellamy sent for when she became alarmed by Kelvin’s long silence. It was then, for the first time, that I heard your real history. Up to that day I had always looked upon you as my cousin. I came here under an assumed name, and I accepted the secretaryship to Sir Thomas Dudgeon, simply that I might see you and be near you, myself unknown. To see you and be near you was to love you. I determined, if it were possible to do so, to win you in the character of a poor man. Whether I have succeeded or failed, you know best.”

“ All this seems very hard to believe,” said Eleanor at last. “ And yet, if you tell me it is true, I suppose it must be so.” She sighed ; and then, in a low tone of voice, as if speaking to herself, she said : “ ‘ Lord Ronald is heir of all my lands, and I am not the Lady Clare.’ ”

“ Yes ; but what says his lordship in conclusion ? ‘ We two will wed the morrow morn, and you shall still be Lady Clare.’ ”

She gazed at him sadly, wonderingly.

"Don't forget your promise," he said.
"With Heaven's help, this day month we
will be man and wife!"

"Then you knew from the first that you
were Gerald Warburton, the heir, and that
I was—nobody?"

She seemed as if she wanted his further
assurance before that fact would impress
itself with sufficient clearness on her mind.

"I knew, dearest, what I have just told
you. I heard it from Miss Bellamy before
I first came down to Pembridge."

"You came to me as a poor man, and
stole my heart away before I knew what
had happened—stole it away, perhaps, for
mere amusement. But now that you have
thrown off your disguise, now that I know
you for the caliph himself, the amusement
is at an end, and you had better give me
back a poor trifle for which you can now
have no possible use."

"As if that poor trifle, as you call it,
were not the one treasure which I hold as
far more precious than aught else the world

could offer me. I have won you, and I mean to keep you, so you may as well resign yourself to your fate."

"Are we in a land of freedom, or are we not?"

"You are not in a land of freedom."

"Then resistance is useless?"

"Entirely so."

Eleanor mused for a moment.

"Tell me this," she said. "Why did you make that confession to me one day in the library? Why did you accuse yourself of having been actuated by mercenary motives?"

"Because I had been told of the interview between young Piper and yourself. I knew, after that, what your thoughts must be concerning me, so that, all things considered, it seemed to me the best thing I could do was to cry 'mea culpa,' even at the expense of lowering myself for a time in your estimation."

"But rather than do that, why not have confessed everything? Why not have told me then what you have told me to-day?"

"Because at that time my plans were not ripe for such a confession. Because I could not then have taken you to your father."

"My father, Gerald!" she cried, as she started to her feet. "Oh! say those words again!"

It was the first time she had called him by his real name, and it thrilled him strangely to hear it from her lips.

"Eleanor, your father—I do not speak of your adopted father this time—is still alive—is waiting and longing to see you. I had a telegram from him only a few hours ago. See, here it is." He took a telegram from his pocket, opened it, and read aloud as follows :

"Everything proved. Our task is at an end. Come at once, and bring my daughter with you."

These words, "my daughter," from a father whom she had never seen, moved Eleanor strangely. Her heart beat so fast, that for a little while she could not speak.

"If I have a father," she stammered out

at last, "why did he not send for me before? Why have you kept me from him all this time?"

"The story that I have now to tell you," answered Gerald, "is a very painful one, but that it will have a happy ending there is proof positive in the telegram which we have just read together. It is the same story in substance as you will find told by Mr. Lloyd in the sealed packet. I think it will be better that I should tell it to you first, and leave you to read it afterwards."

Eleanor was trembling a little. She could not help it. She seemed to dread hearing what Gerald might yet have to tell her. He tried to comfort her after the foolish fashion of people in love. Then drawing her close to him, so that her head rested on his shoulder, he went on with his narrative.

"Many years ago, in a small provincial town more than two hundred miles from this place, there lived four young ladies who had all been schoolfellows together, and who, now that they were grown up,

were bosom friends. One of these young ladies married a gentleman, Ambrose Murray by name, and a doctor by profession. You are their only child, and your name is Eleanor Murray. Another of the young ladies married Mr. Jacob Lloyd, and you were their adopted daughter. The third married my father. The fourth remained unmarried, and is your friend and mine—Miss Bellamy.

“A few months after you were born, a terrible misfortune befel your father. He was arrested on a false charge of murder, was tried, and condemned to die.”

“Murder! Condemned to die!” gasped Eleanor.

“The charge was a false one, dearest—don’t forget that. But before the day came that would have left you fatherless, his mind gave way under the shock, and his sentence was commuted into one of imprisonment for life. Your mother, frail of health and delicate from a child, found the burden of life more than she could bear, and Heaven, in its pity, took her to itself.”

Gerald paused, and as he did so he felt that Eleanor was sobbing silently, with her head still resting on his shoulder.

“Then it was, when you were left alone in the world, that Mr. Lloyd and his wife took you to their hearts and home. They had no children of their own, and they adopted you as their daughter, even to giving you their name—for, as you must remember, your father’s innocence had never been proved. The evidence at the trial had been terribly against him, and the world still adjudged him to be guilty.

“Shortly after their adoption of you, Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd removed to Pembridge, where they were entire strangers, and, except Miss Bellamy, no one ever knew that you were not their own child.

“And so years went on till Mrs. Lloyd died. It was shortly after this event that Mr. Lloyd, mindful, probably, of the uncertainty of life, put into Miss Bellamy’s hands the very sealed packet about which we have heard so much of late. In case Miss Bellamy should survive him, it was to

be given over by her into the hands of Mr. Kelvin, who had had the management of Mr. Lloyd's affairs for years. Mr. Lloyd himself doubtless shrank from telling you the real facts of your history ; but as your father was still living, it was imperatively necessary that you should be made aware of them whenever he—Mr. Lloyd—should die. To Mr. Kelvin was delegated the task of breaking the news to you. In what way he has fulfilled that task we have now seen.

“ All these long years Mr. Murray had been shut up in his living tomb. In the course of time his senses had mercifully been given back to him. Two or three times a year Miss Bellamy went to see him, and took him tidings of you and of the outside world. He knew that you were safe and well, and he would not let your young life be blighted by the sad story of his wrongs and sufferings.”

“ Oh, if some kind friend had but told me !” exclaimed Eleanor. “ It was cruel, cruel to keep me in ignorance of what it

was my simple right to be told ! It was my place, not Miss Bellamy's, to go to see him and comfort him."

" It was at Mr. Murray's own frequently-expressed desire that you were left in ignorance."

" All those years—all those summers and winters while I was growing up a happy, careless girl, he—my father—was shut up between the terrible walls of a prison. I—I cannot bear to think of it !"

" But it is all over now, and in a few hours more you will be with him."

" And you know him, Gerald ! You have seen him and talked with him ! No wonder some instinct of the heart bade me love you."

Gerald kissed her again—whether for the twentieth or twenty-first time in the short space of thirty minutes, matters nothing to nobody. He felt that he had long arrears to make up. Then he went on with his story.

" The first time I ever saw Mr. Murray was in Miss Bellamy's sitting-room a few

nights after my arrival in London in answer to her summons. Your father had escaped from prison, and had come to Miss Bellamy, as the only person living whom he knew, for shelter."

"Escaped! Oh! if I had only been there to receive him!"

"He and I became friends at once when he knew that I was the son of one whom his wife had known and loved so well. Fortunately, no very extreme search was made after him, and I may so far relieve your mind at once by telling you that he has never been re-captured. In making his escape from prison, Mr. Murray's mind seemed to be possessed by one idea, and one only. That idea was the possibility, or probability, of being able to prove to the world his innocence of the dreadful crime laid to his charge twenty long years ago.

"How and by what means this great end has at last been accomplished, it would take me too long to tell you in detail now. That may be left for an after occasion. That he has succeeded completely and fully in what

for a long time seemed an utterly impossible task, this telegram in his own words is ample proof. Not till he should have so succeeded would he allow you to be communicated with, or even to be made aware of his existence."

"How very strange of him! If he had but trusted me!"

"But the troubles of the past are over now. I propose to start for London by the six o'clock train this evening, and to take you with me. We shall find your father waiting at Miss Bellamy's to receive you."

"This evening! See my father this very evening!"

"Why not? Has he not sent for you?"

"I shall have to speak to Lady Dudgeon, and—and—"

"And you will be ready equipped for your start by 5.30. I will ask Sir Thomas to let Fenton drive us to the station in the wagonette."

Eleanor stood up and pressed both her

hands to her head. "I am far from sure that it's not all a dream," she said.

Her eyes were still tear-stained, but a wan April smile was hovering faintly round her lips.

"Kiss me, and try to discover whether you are awake or asleep that way."

"Does my father know that you are acquainted with me?" she asked suddenly.

"Not till a few days ago was he made aware that I had ever seen you."

"Then all the time you have been at Stammars you have known my father, but without making him aware that you knew me, as you have known that I was not Mr. Lloyd's daughter, and that you yourself were the heir to his property."

"It would be impossible to state the case more briefly and clearly."

"Even now I hardly seem to see clearly the motives by which you were actuated. But I have heard so many strange things to-day, that that is hardly to be wondered at."

"The two most powerful motives that

actuated me were these: your father's strongly-expressed wish that you should be left unaware of his existence and of the terrible story of his life till he himself was prepared to reveal everything; and secondly, my desire to win my wife as a poor man wins his—for himself alone, and not for whatever worldly goods fortune may have encumbered him with."

"I am afraid," said Eleanor, still with a smile, "that you are a far more enigmatical character than I took you to be—that I shall find you far more difficult to understand than, in my simplicity, I ever dreamt of."

"You hold the key to my heart, and that unlocks everything. When you come to know me better, as I hope you will do some day, you will find that, like most of my fellows, I am very shallow when properly gauged. Only, perhaps, I have the art of hiding it better than some. But now I must leave you for a little while. Remember, I shall expect you to be ready by half-past five. In fact, I have already tele-

graphed that we shall leave for London by the six o'clock train."

He pressed her hastily to his heart, and then she fled.

It was half-past seven when Eleanor and Gerald alighted at King's Cross Station. Miss Bellamy was there to meet them. Eleanor's arms were round her neck in a moment.

“Oh, my dear Miss Bellamy!” she exclaimed, half laughing and half crying, “how happy it makes me to see you again! I thought you had run away from me for ever.”

“Only for a little while, love. I had some one else to look after of late—some one who is anxiously waiting to see you.”

They all got into a cab. There was no opportunity for much conversation as they rattled through the noisy streets; but just then Eleanor did not want to talk. She sat holding Miss Bellamy's hand very fast and inwardly trembling.

It was a good hour's drive to Ormond Square, but to Eleanor it seemed only a few

minutes. Gerald, having handed the ladies out of the cab, took his leave for a little while, promising to call again in an hour. Eleanor, still like one in a maze, and still clinging tightly to Miss Bellamy, found herself next moment indoors.

“Take off your hat, love, but don’t bother about anything else just now,” said Miss Bellamy.

Then they went upstairs, and then a door was flung open, and there, in the middle of the lighted room, Eleanor saw standing a tall, frail-looking man, who seemed as though he were obliged to steady himself by clinging to the back of a chair, and whose lips were working with nervous excitement.

“Eleanor Murray, there is your father!” said Miss Bellamy, in a voice that was not without a touch of solemnity.

Eleanor staggered forward into the room. Ambrose Murray met her half-way, and caught her in his arms. She fell on his breast in a passion of sobs.

“Oh, papa, papa! why have you kept

me from you all this time?" was all she could say.

Miss Bellamy came gently out and shut the door.



CHAPTER XII.

THE STRONG-ROOM.

“**N**O chance of anybody hearing him but the dead folk in the church-yard, and they'll only grin to themselves and take no notice.”

So muttered Pringle to himself as he stood at the foot of the stairs and listened to Van Duren's cry for help.

And he was right. So long as the doors were kept shut, Van Duren's loudest cries would not penetrate beyond the basement-floor of the old house. In the office above people might, and did, come and go on business, but not the faintest echo of that

terrible cry of despair, that was so near and yet so far away, ever reached them.

Pringle was there, as usual, to attend to the different callers, so far as it was possible for him to do so in the absence of his chief. Many were the inquiries during the day as to the probable date of Van Duren's return.

"He may be here at any time, or he may be away for another week. Most uncertain in his movements," Pringle would say to the inquirers. And as soon as they were gone he would rub his hands, and chuckle to himself, and mutter: "Revenged at last! Every dog has his day, and mine has come now."

And so the day slowly wore itself through till evening came round again. Pringle shut up the office at the usual time, and then, after a hearty tea, he prepared to sally forth for the evening's enjoyment. He told himself that he would take the entire round of the haunts where he was known, indulging himself with a glass or two at each of them, and have, altogether, a very pleasant time of it.

Before starting he went to bid Van Duren good-bye.

“If the postman comes while I’m out, you’ll kindly take in the letters, won’t you?” he said, with a sneer. “There have been more inquiries than usual for you to-day. What fun it was to send them off—some with one excuse, and some with another—and you within a dozen yards of them all the time! But I must go now. You are very pleasant company, Mr. Van Duren, but I must leave you for a little while.”

Thus saying, Pringle locked the outer door, and having made sure that he had the latch-key in his pocket, he put down the kitchen gas, and let himself out by way of the front door, which he clashed to after him with a bang loud enough to wake every dismal echo that had its lodgment in the dismal old house in the churchyard.

It was close upon midnight when Jonas Pringle came picking his way carefully along the silent streets in the direction of Spur Alley. This care on his part was

necessitated by the number and strength of the potations in which he had indulged during the evening. He knew quite well what he was about ; he knew that he had taken more than was good for him ; he knew that his course along the streets was rather a mazy one ; he knew that his speech was a little thick, and that short words were infinitely preferable to long ones ; but for all that, it was only his legs that were affected : his head was still as coldly calculating as ever it had been.

He had just turned the corner of Spur Alley, and was within a few yards of the house, when suddenly a woman, who had been sitting in the shadow of the steps, sprang to her feet, stood for a moment gazing fixedly at him, and then took to her heels and quickly disappeared round the opposite corner. A presentiment that it was his daughter shot through Pringle's heart the moment he set eyes on her. He shouted to her to stop, but she never even turned her head. He made an abortive attempt to run after her, but that was

equally unavailing. Then he sat down on the steps where his daughter had been sitting—for he felt sure that it was she—and began to cry.

He was roused by the clocks striking the half-hour after midnight. He got up, shivering from head to foot, and let himself in by means of the latch-key. He did not go downstairs, but stumbled his way to his own room, and, without undressing, flung himself on his pallet, and slept unbrokenly till long after broad daylight.

He lighted the kitchen fire and got his breakfast ready before going near his prisoner. Last night's excitement and dissipation had left him, if such a thing were possible, harder and more cruel than before. Not one single grain of pity for his wretched victim made itself felt in his heart when, after breakfast, he went and knocked at the door of the strong-room. He was still convinced that it was his daughter whom he had seen over-night, and the sight of her only served to freshen up his wrongs, and to intensify a hatred that needed no additional fuel.

"Max Van Duren, are you still alive?" he cried, rapping with his key on the door.

A deep groan was the only reply for a little while.

Pringle kept on hammering at the door. "Why don't you answer me?" he screamed.

"For Heaven's sake, Pringle, give me a drop of water, or else leave me to die in peace!" It was hardly to be recognized as the voice of Van Duren, so faint and full of anguish was it.

Pringle's only answer was a laugh.

"Pringle, I am dying!" pleaded the imprisoned man. "The wound on my head has opened afresh, and I am slowly bleeding to death. I am too weak to stand. A few hours will end everything. Give me some water—give me a pillow for my head—give me a little light—and then you may leave me to die."

"All very fine, Mr. Van, but you don't get over me with any of your dodges. Once get the door open it would be all over with me."

"Pringle, I swear to you that I am dying

—that I have not strength to walk across the floor."

"Then die," cried Pringle. "It is all you are fit for. Ask for no pity from me." And with that he strode away without waiting to hear another word, and shut the outer door behind him.

He stayed in the office as usual till evening; but he did not go near Van Duren again all day. He had found a bottle of brandy upstairs in Van Duren's room; this he appropriated, and his devotions were paid to it so often during the day, that when evening came very little of it was left. When he had closed the office, he sallied out, as on the previous evening, but still without visiting his prisoner. He had no appetite to-day; he could not eat. All he craved was more drink, and so long as he had money in his pocket there was no difficulty in getting that. Again he took what he called his rounds, and again it was close on midnight when he found himself back in Spur Alley.

He was fumbling with his latch-key,

when a hand was laid lightly on his shoulder. He had heard no sound of footsteps, and he turned with a low cry of terror. He turned and saw that it was his daughter who had touched him.

“Why, Jessie—Jessie, my darling! is that you?” he exclaimed.

“Yes, it is I,” said the woman, bitterly. “What have you done with Max Van Duren?”

“Oh, never mind him just now. But why don’t you kiss me, Jessie? Why don’t you kiss the foolish old man that has never ceased to love you, and search for you, and long for you, day and night?” He was half laughing and half crying as he spoke.

She just put her lips to his cheek, but he was not satisfied till he had drawn her to him and she had kissed him again and again. Then she repeated her question: “Father, what have you done with Max Van Duren?”

“Oh, I’ve got the scoundrel in safe custody, never fear!”

“In safe custody! What do you mean?” she asked, anxiously.

“Come inside, and I’ll tell you all about it.”

He had succeeded in opening the door by this time, and his daughter followed him into the dark entrance-hall.

“You needn’t be afraid of meeting anything worse than black-beetles,” he said, with a chuckle. “Follow me, Jessie, and mind the stairs,” he added, when he had bolted the front door. “There’s fifteen of ‘em; I’ve counted them many a time. We shall find a glimmer in the kitchen, I dare say.”

They groped their way down, and entered the room.

“Many a worse crib than this,” said Pringle, as he turned the gas full on.

Then he stirred the fire, and drew a chair up for his daughter and another for himself, and produced a bottle of brandy.

“And now for a comfortable little confab,” he said, gleefully. “I’ve quite a lot to tell you, dear; and I dare say you have something to tell me.”

“Suppose you tell me your news first,” said the woman.

Neither in her manner towards him, nor in her mode of addressing him, was there the slightest trace of tenderness, or any token by which a stranger would have guessed that the man before her was her father, whom she had not spoken to for several years. Her hard mouth and her watchful eyes never for a moment relaxed their hardness or their watchfulness.

“Funny, wasn’t it,” began Pringle, rubbing his lean, yellow hands in front of the fire, but with his eyes fixed on his daughter, “that I should have been Van Duren’s clerk for three years before finding out who he was?”

“And how did you find it out at last?” asked Jessie, without any apparent emotion.

“I was rooting about among his papers one day, when I found some of your letters, my dear. It was the greatest surprise I’ve ever had in my life.”

“He has kept my letters, has he?” said the woman, in an eager, passionate way, breaking for a moment through the restraint she had hitherto put upon herself.

"He *has* kept them ; so much the worse for him, as things have turned out," said Pringle, grimly.

"What did you do next ?"

"I put back the letters where I had found them, and waited for him."

"And waited for him ?" cried the woman, wonderingly.

"Yes ; he was away from home at the time I discovered the letters, and I waited till he came back."

"And what did you do then ?"

"It was only the night before last that he got back home. I had made up my mind from the first how to act. He was only here for the night. He was going to start away again next morning ; but I guessed he wouldn't leave without visiting the safe in the strong-room. So instead of going up to bed, I came down here and waited in the dark for him. I seemed to have been waiting a month, but it was only a few hours, when he came. He went forward into the strong-room, and turned on the gas. Then I stole swiftly after him.

He did not hear me—he did not see me till the last moment; and then it was too late. Before he could reach the iron door, I had shut it on him and turned the key."

" You locked him in !"

" I locked him in. I made him my prisoner; and there he is at this very moment."

The woman had changed colour and started to her feet when her father made this disclosure. But another thought seemed to strike her, and she sat down again, her ashy face turned full upon him, and a strange, half-savage, half-defiant look in her eyes, which it was just as well that the old man did not notice.

Pringle lighted his pipe.

" There's nothing like taking things comfortably," he said. " What a funny girl you are," he added presently. " I thought when you heard how I had bowled out the scoundrel who had blasted both your life and mine, that the least you could say would be, ' Well done !' But there you sit as cool as a cucumber, and as mum as a mouse—just as if I had been telling you a bit of news out of yesterday's paper."

“Your news has taken me so much by surprise, that I don’t know what to say,” replied Jessie; “I want time to think it all over.”

“But aren’t you glad, girl, that we’ve got the villain fast? Isn’t it sweet to you to feel that his turn has come at last? My wrongs are deep, but yours are deeper. You ought to exult in what I’ve done!”

“So I do, but I can hardly realize it yet. I keep on fancying it must all be a dream.”

“It’s an uncommon ugly reality as far as he’s concerned,” answered Pringle. “I don’t think he’ll trouble us long. I think another day and night will about finish him.”

Gradually the warmth of the fire, and the brandy he had taken and was still taking, had a somnolent effect upon Pringle. He found his eyelids closing involuntarily.

“I don’t think an hour or two’s snooze would be a bad sort of thing,” he said.

“Where is this strong-room that you talk about?” asked Jessie.

“Why, close by here—on the bottom floor—just at the end of that passage.”

"And the keys—who keeps them?"

"Who should keep them but me? I've got them safe enough, never you fear," and he tapped his pocket to verify the fact.

He poured himself out some more brandy, and when he had drunk it she assisted him to the sofa, lowered the gas a little, and then took up her own position in the big easy chair on the opposite side of the fireplace.

A few minutes later her father's deep, regular breathing told her that he was fast asleep.

Then she crossed noiselessly over to where he was lying, and began to feel for the pocket that held his keys. She was not long in finding what she wanted. Then she lighted a candle, and taking the candle-stick in one hand and the two keys in the other (after giving a last look at her father), she set out in search of the strong-room.

The little Dutch clock in the kitchen was on the stroke of eight when Jonas Pringle opened his eyes. He opened them, rubbed them, shut them, and opened them again. He might well stare and ask himself whether

he had not taken leave of his senses. On a mattress in front of the kitchen fire, a coverlid thrown over him, lay the form of Max Van Duren. His eyes were shut and he was breathing heavily. Pringle was still staring at this terrible object, and trying to pull his wits together, when his attention was attracted by the noise of footsteps descending the stairs, and next moment Jessie ushered into the room a stranger, who at once crossed to where Van Duren was lying, and gazed fixedly down on him. The stranger was, in fact, a doctor whom Jessie had summoned by bribing a passing milk-boy to go and fetch him.

Van Duren was an utter stranger to him.

“Who are you, and what have you come for?” screamed Pringle. “Get out of this, or it will be worse for you! I’ll have no thieving quacks here.”

“Who is this man?” asked the doctor.

“My father.”

“Then the sooner you have him removed the better. He must be either drunk or mad.”

Jessie took her father by the shoulders and pressed him down by main force on to the sofa.

“ Speak another word at your peril,” she said sternly. “ Disturb this gentleman again, and as sure as I am what I am, I’ll have you locked up in there—in there, do you understand ?” and she pointed in the direction of the strong-room.

There was something in his daughter’s face that cowed him—that frightened him even. He had never seen such an expression on any other face. He sat down without a word.

The doctor was down on one knee by this time, examining the unconscious man.

“ How did he come by this terrible wound on his head ?” he asked presently ; “ and why has he been allowed to sink so low ? Some one ought to have been called in two days ago.”

“ It’s only about two days since he got home,” said the woman, “ and he brought the wound with him. How he came by it nobody knows but himself. Then, he was

accidentally”—with a glance at her father—“shut up in the room where he keeps his books and things, and couldn’t help himself, and there I found him about two o’clock this morning.”

“Was he conscious when you found him? Did he know you?”

“Yes.”

“Why did you not send for medical assistance as soon as you found him?”

“Because he wouldn’t let me—he wouldn’t hear of it.”

“More fool he,” said the doctor brusquely. “What did you give him to eat or drink?”

“All that I could persuade him to take was a little brandy and water.”

“Well, I can do nothing for him till he wakes,” said the doctor as he rose to his feet. “I may tell you that he appears, so far as I can judge at present, to be in about as bad a way as it is possible for a man to be. I don’t think it advisable to disturb him, and this sleep may do him good. I will call again about ten o’clock. Should he

awake before then send me word, and till I arrive keep on giving him a teaspoonful of brandy every few minutes.” With that the doctor went.

Jessie was kneeling by Van Duren’s head, and she never moved to let the doctor out. Pringle, with his red, watery eyes, and doubled-up back, still sat on the sofa, his elbows resting on his knees, and his chin in the palms of his hands, looking like a ghoul waiting for its prey. Suddenly his daughter turned her head, and their eyes met.

“Look on your work and be satisfied,” she said.

“I am looking, and I am satisfied,” was the grim reply.

“And now,” said the woman, speaking quietly, but with the same look on her face that had already cowed him, “you had better leave me, or there’ll be harm done. I know there will. If you hadn’t been my father I should have stabbed you to the heart before now for what you have done here”—pointing to the dying man. “Go! go! or worse will come of it.”

Pringle cowered before her, and muttering something to the effect that a good wash would freshen him up, he slunk out of the room and shuffled upstairs, coughing painfully as he went.

Jessie resumed her watch by the unconscious man, bathing his brows now and again with a little vinegar. Presently he opened his eyes and gazed up wonderingly into her face. Then he tried to raise himself on his elbow, but fell back with a groan. Jessie gave him a little brandy, and that seemed to revive him.

“Where am I ; what has happened ?” he murmured.

“Hush ! don’t talk now,” said Jessie. “The doctor will be here in a little while, and give you something to revive you.”

“The doctor ? The——Ah ! everything comes back to me now. It was you who opened my dungeon and helped me, bit by bit, to crawl here. What good angel sent you to me, Jessie ?”

Then, before she could answer, he began to mutter to himself in German, a language

which he very rarely spoke, and evidently knew her no longer.

At this moment there came a sound of loud knocking at the front door. At the noise Van Duren again turned his eyes on Jessie.

He looked at her as he had never looked at her before : with a pathos and tenderness indescribable. But he did not speak.

Jessie's quick ears had heard her father open the door in answer to the knocking, and now there was a sound of footsteps coming down the stone stairs that led to the kitchen. Next minute the door was pushed open, and three men came into the room. One of them was Peter Byrne, and the other two were members of the police force in plain clothes. Byrne was startled at the sight before him, but he did not lose his presence of mind.

“ There, gentlemen, is the man you are in search of. This is Max Van Duren, formerly known by the name of Max Jacoby.”

One of the officers advanced. “ Max

Jacoby, you are charged with being the murderer of one Paul Stilling, at Tewkesbury, many years ago, and I hold a warrant for your arrest."

"A warrant for my arrest!" echoed Van Duren feebly. "You have come too late, gentlemen--too late, I say! I am beyond your reach now. I am going where you dare not follow me!"

His eyes closed once more; he breathed three or four times, and then not again.



CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

N the sands at Boulogne-sur-mer. Time, a sunny afternoon. The persons are Mrs. Kelvin and her son. The lady is half sitting half reclining in the Bath chair in which she has been wheeled down to the sands. Matthew Kelvin is sitting on a camp stool close by his mother, smoking a cigarette, and dividing his attention between the bathers and a lazy skimming of the London papers, which have just come to hand. He is looking infinitely better than when we saw him last, and his mother thinks that if

she can only persuade him to stay away from that odious business for another month, he will become as strong and hearty as ever he was. It is her fixed belief that Matthew cannot really be happy out of his office, and it is a belief that he had never cared to disturb.

Mrs. Kelvin's attention, like that of her son, is half distracted from the gay scene before her. The steamer has brought her several letters, which she is reading intermittently, smiling to herself now and then as she reads, and anon lifting her eyes to note the latest arrival on the sands, or to watch for a moment the kaleidoscopic changes in the ever-varying groups of loungers and bathers with which she is surrounded. There is one letter, however, that she has kept till the last. Her face clouds as she opens it. She glances at Matthew, and sees that he is still busy with his newspapers. The letter does not take her long to read, and, with a little sigh, she puts it back into its envelope. The sigh rouses Matthew—he looks up.

“What is it, mother?” he asks. “Have Mrs. Aylmer’s preserves turned out badly? or has Miss Rainbow’s ancient tabby given up the ghost at last?” He takes her hand, and squeezes it with a little affectionate gesture.

“Matthew,” says the old lady very gravely, “I have had a letter this morning from Olive Deane.”

He turns quickly round, and his face seems to harden as he turns.

“And has she really dared to write to you?” he says, sternly. “Does she think that the past can be so soon forgotten?”

“My dear, you are not like yourself when you talk in that way,” answers Mrs. Kelvin, as she lays her hand caressingly on her son’s shoulder. “I never rightly understood the reason of that terrible quarrel between you and Olive. You were too ill for me to question you much at the time, and since you have been better the mere mention of Olive’s name has seemed so distasteful to you, that I have spoken of her as little as possible. But to say that I

should not like to know how it happened that you fell out so strangely, would be to say that I am not a woman."

Under his breath Mr. Kelvin calls himself by a very strong name for having spoken so hastily. He has carefully concealed from his mother the fact of Olive Deane having been implicated in any way with regard to his long illness. He has dreaded the effect such a revelation might have upon her. He has allowed her to surmise and wonder as to the origin of their sudden estrangement, but he has never really enlightened her.

"Olive went off to Stammars one morning with a letter from you," resumes the old lady. "An hour later you rush off after her, although you have not been out of your room for two months. You come back after a time, but Olive does not. Next day she sends for her boxes, but from the hour when she set out for Stammars till now, I have never set eyes on Olive Deane."

"Yes, it must have seemed strange to

you," says Mr. Kelvin, after a pause; "but the subject was such a very painful one that I always felt reluctant to mention it."

"You never thought, dear, how painful it must be to me to be left in such a state of doubt and uncertainty."

"I know that I ought to have told you long ago. I will tell you now." He pauses while he looks at his watch and folds up his newspaper. "The facts of the case can be told you in very few words," he says. "Olive Deane, during the time that I was ill, suppressed a very important private letter that had been sent to me through the post."

"That was wrong, very wrong indeed," says the old lady, gravely. "Had any other than you told me of it, I could not have believed them."

"That morning when she went to Stammars it was with a letter from me addressed to Miss Lloyd. That letter she also suppressed, after having, I presume, opened it and read it. I was very angry with her indeed. I spoke my mind very

strongly on the point, and we parted—never, I hope, to meet again."

Mrs. Kelvin does not speak, and Matthew, looking up, sees that her eyes are full of tears. "How would she feel, and what would she say, if she knew everything?" he asks himself. "But she must never be told."

"What you have just told me has pained me deeply," she says at last. "But what a strange thing to do! What could her motive possibly be? I believed in her as implicitly as if she had been my own child. And then how kind and attentive she was during your illness!" Matthew shudders. "She was simply invaluable to me at that time. And so fond of you, too! And now you tell me these strange things about her. I—I can't understand it at all."

"The subject is a very painful one to both of us. Suppose we say nothing more about it," says Matthew, speaking very gently.

"I thought it strange that she never

once mentions your name in her letter," says Mrs. Kelvin, as she wipes her eyes. "It is just as well to know that the girl is not without a home. She writes me that she has accepted a situation with a family who are going out to the Hague in a couple of months; so that she is not likely to trouble any of us in time to come."

At this moment, who should march gravely up, and raise his hat with what he firmly believes to be an air of the most refined fashion, but Mr. Pod Piper? Mr. Piper wears a wideawake and a fashionable tweed suit. He has taken care to button up his coat two minutes ago, so as to hide from Mr. Kelvin's eyes the elaborate filagree chain, of Palais Royal workmanship, which is festooned across his waistcoat. But the huge pin in his scarf cannot be so easily kept out of sight, and all the time he is talking to Mr. Kelvin he feels—and the feeling gives him what he calls the "tingles"—that that gentleman is critically regarding it, and as he stands there he inwardly resolves that he will make a present of it to

his bosom friend, Bob Tacket, the very day he gets back to Pembridge, and that he will never wear another pin in his scarf as long as he lives.

“Why, Piper, is that you?” says Mr. Kelvin, in his most pleasant voice. “Got back safe and sound, eh? How have you enjoyed yourself?”

“Oh, splendidly, sir!—thanks to you. Never had such a holiday before. Paris is a wonderful place, sir!”

“I suppose you speak French like a native by this time, eh?”

“Not quite that, sir. I know about fifty words, and I’ve got along famously. Fifty words are quite enough to go from one end of the country to the other with: a smile and a shrug go such a long way with the French.”

“I think you had better not cross till to-morrow morning,” says Mr. Kelvin. “You can then take over with you some papers for Mr. Bray. We dine at six, and you must dine with us to-day.”

Pod stammers out something—he hardly

knows what—and colours up to the roots of his hair. Dine with the governor! What will they say at Pembridge when he tells them? He feels himself grow an inch taller in two minutes. After a few kind words from Mrs. Kelvin, he is dismissed till six o'clock.

Pod's trip to Paris is accounted for by the fact of his employer having made him a present of a twenty-pound note and a week's holiday. Ten pounds out of the twenty Pod has given to his mother. With the remaining ten, and some previous savings, he has enjoyed himself for a week in Paris.

“ You don't mean to say, Matthew, that that boy has been to Paris all alone ? ”

“ I suppose he has. Why not ? ”

“ Consider his age. Consider the temptations of such a place.”

“ Oh, I would trust Piper anywhere. He's got the head of a man of thirty on those boy's shoulders of his.”

“ He seems a shrewd boy, certainly.

You appear to have taken a quite uncommon interest in him of late, Matthew."

"Yes, I do feel a great interest in him. It is not often I take a fancy, but I've taken a fancy to Piper, and I mean to put him in the way of making his fortune."

"As how?"

"By having him articled to a first-class legal firm, and afterwards by purchasing a partnership for him, or else by setting him up on his own account."

"But that will cost a great deal of money."

"Not so much, perhaps, as you imagine. But whatever the cost may be, I have made up my mind to do it, and do it I will."

Mrs. Kelvin knows nothing of the great service which Pod Piper has rendered her son. She does not know that but for Pod's shrewd thoughtfulness and presence of mind she might perhaps no longer have had a son. But Matthew Kelvin knows, and does not forget.

"But if you want to have young Piper

articled, why not article him to yourself, Matthew?"

"Because I think we shall be better apart, and that it will be better for him to leave Pembridge for a few years. Because, too——"

"Because what, dear?"

"Because I have some serious thoughts of retiring from business before long."

A pause. Mrs. Kelvin tries to adjust her spectacles, but cannot, her hand trembles so much.

"The business, Matthew, that was built up by your father and grandfather, through so many years of industry and thrift?"

"Yes, the business that was built up by my father and grandfather, and that has been crowned by me with many years of quiet work. Mother, I am rich enough to give it up. I shall never marry and have children, and—I am ambitious.—Because my father and grandfather lived and died two quiet country lawyers, that is no reason why I should be content to do the same. To-day is not as yesterday. I have larger

views and different aims than theirs. I am sick and tired to death of the petty drudgery necessitated by a business like mine. I want to get into Parliament, I want to——”

“Into Parliament, Matthew! How proud I should be to see you there !”

“Would you? Then I hope you will see me there before this time next year. I know for a fact that Sir Thomas means to give up his seat next spring. Some of his chief supporters have been coquetting with me already. But if I become M.P., I must give up my profession and devote the whole of my time to my new duties. I hope to make my mark yet before I die.”

“You are right, and I was wrong,” says Mrs. Kelvin. “Business must be given up. You have a career before you. After a time, perhaps, you will marry, and then——”

“Never, mother. I shall never marry,” says Matthew very gravely.

The tide has been coming in very quickly, and a bigger wave than ordinary now comes creaming up nearly to their feet. They must move at once.

“It is time to go, the breeze is growing chilly,” says Mrs. Kelvin. “You must tell me more of your plans and thoughts to-morrow.”

As they turn the corner of the Etablissement, they meet and pass three people—a lady and two gentlemen—who are on their way to the sands.

“What a remarkably handsome woman!” says Mrs. Kelvin to her son.

“Just my thought, mother. I wonder what country woman she is—not English, certainly.”

But in saying this, Matthew Kelvin is mistaken. The lady who has attracted the admiration of himself and his mother is, in fact, none other than our old acquaintance, Miriam Byrne—now Mrs. James Baron. The gentlemen with her are her father and her husband.

Mr. Kelvin and Peter Byrne have never met, and are unaware of each other’s existence. They have both been prominent actors in that strange drama which has had Eleanor Lloyd and Gerald War-

burton for its central figures—a drama which must of necessity have worked itself out in an altogether different manner had neither of them, or only one of them, played a part in it. Yet, to-day, they pass each other, knowing nothing of all this, each going his own road, never to meet again. So runs the world away.

Mr. Byrne looks younger and more jaunty than ever. His new set of teeth are marvels of dentistry and gleam whitely in the sun every time he smiles—and to-day he seems to be one perpetual smile. There is a fine bright colour on his cheeks, the origin of which it might not be wise to inquire too curiously into. His blue frock coat is tightly buttoned, so as to show off the elegance of his figure. He wears lemon-coloured gloves and carries the slimmest of umbrellas.

Nearly everyone turns to look at Miriam. Various types of French and English beauty are by no means uncommon on the sands at Boulogne, but Miriam's peculiar style of face is very rarely seen in the north of

Europe, and it strikes the gay crowd with all the freshness of novelty.

Miriam is dressed in the latest fashion of sea-side extravagance. She is quite conscious of the sensation which she creates as she moves slowly along, but she has been used to be stared at from the time that she can remember at all. To be admired seems to her as natural as to breathe : admiration is her birthright, and she accepts it with the serene self-unconsciousness of a queen accepting the homage of her subjects.

Mr. James Baron is one of those fair-haired, blue-eyed young Saxons who seem all to have been cast in the same mould, and of whom there is little or nothing to be said. But he is Miriam's choice, and Miriam loves him, and that is enough.

The services rendered Ambrose Murray by Peter Byrne and his daughter have been most liberally rewarded. But, in addition to this, some old mining shares which Byrne had long looked upon as utterly worthless have — to use his own phrase — “turned up trumps” at last, and

the old poverty-stricken days in Amelia Terrace are at an end for ever. Through Gerald's influence, a capital situation has been found for young Baron with a large wine firm at Bordeaux, so they are all keeping holiday together for a little while before the young couple set out for their new home.

“Papa,” says Miriam with a smile, “if anyone had told you, three months ago, that you would be walking here with James and me, that you would call James ‘my dear boy’ a hundred times a day, and that you would have actually given me away—with your blessing—to the man whose name you could not bear to hear me mention, what would you have said?”

“I should have recommended the immediate application of a strait waistcoat. But circumstances alter cases, as we have all lived to prove, and it's only your narrow-minded people who will never admit that they are in the wrong.”

“Do you remember how shocked you were when I told you to what use I should

put Mr. Warburton's money if it ever came into my hands?"

"Ah, my dear, you never really understood the secret of my opposition to your little love affair. James, here, has a great deal to thank me for. I knew your disposition, dear, better than you knew it yourself. I knew that if your courtship were allowed to go on in a quiet, conventional, hum-drum sort of way, without any parental opposition to infuse a spice of romance and difficulty into the affair, you would never learn to care quite so much for James, or to value him so highly as you would do if your wishes were judiciously thwarted for a time. You like your husband all the better because you have had a difficulty in making him your husband. It is a sort of weakness by no means uncommon with your sex. As I said before, James has much to thank me for."

Mr. Baron and his wife both burst into laughter.

"Trust papa for never being without an excuse!" says Miriam.

The scene changes. The accident ward in a London hospital. Time, eight p.m.

On a pallet in one corner of the ward, between which and the long row of other pallets stands a big black screen, lies all that remains of Jonas Pringle. He has breathed his last but a few minutes ago. Kneeling on the floor, her face buried in her hands, is the dead man's daughter. Run over in the streets when drunk, he has been brought here early in the afternoon. He is just able to tell his daughter's address, and then he lapses into unconsciousness. He never opens his eyes or speaks again, but with his daughter's hand clasped in his, he sleeps himself away as gently as though he were a little child hushed on its mother's breast.

Jessie is roused at last by a hand laid gently on her shoulder. She looks up, and sees one of the visiting sisters of mercy. She rises to her feet, and the sister, who has thought she was crying, is surprised to see that her eyes are dry and tearless.

“He was your father,” says the sister,

with a slight touch of surprise in her voice.

“Yes, he was my father,” says Jessie, gently.

Then she asks for a pair of scissors, and having cut off a lock of her father’s hair, she wraps it in a piece of paper, and places it inside the bosom of her dress. Then, still with dry and tearless eyes, she kisses the dead man’s cold forehead.

“I’ve got money at home,” she says to the sister, who is standing quietly by. “The parish mustn’t lay a finger on him. I’ll bury him myself.”

Then, with a muttered good night, she turns and goes. She stands for a moment at the hospital door, gazing up and down the rainy, lamp-lit street, and shudders as she gazes. Then she draws her scanty shawl more closely round her, and stepping out into the rain, she hurries away—whither?

Again the scene changes. The great drawing-room at Stammars. Time, nine p.m. of a January evening.

It is Miss Sophy's birthday, and there is a large gathering of young people to celebrate the event. There are only five grown-up persons in the room, and all of them are known to us. First and foremost come Sir Thomas and Lady Dudgeon, looking exactly as they have looked any time these ten years. That thin, dreamy-looking, white-haired gentleman in the corner, with a very tiny young lady on his knee, who is resting from her romps for a few minutes, is Mr. Ambrose Murray. That dark, foreign-looking gentleman, and that handsome lady, who are walking through a quadrille with two partners of the mature age of twelve, are Mr. and Mrs. Warburton. They two, together with Mr. Murray, having eaten their Christmas dinner with dear, kind-hearted Miss Bellamy, have come down for a month's visit to Stammars.

Mr. Murray can now bear his own name, and is as free to come and go as any one. Acting on the advice of friends, he went back to the asylum from which he had escaped, and gave himself up. A case was

then prepared for the Home Secretary, and that high functionary, having considered the same at his leisure, has been graciously pleased to advise that Ambrose Murray be granted a free pardon, and that the conviction recorded against him be considered null and void.

Eleanor and Gerald have been married three months, and are as happy as they deserve to be. This morning they walked through the lanes and fields, as far as the little churchyard in which Jacob Lloyd sleeps his last. Eleanor always feels as if she must have had two fathers—one in the past and one in the present. With tears in her eyes, she talks to her husband of the dear father who lies here, and she kisses the wreath of everlastings she has brought with her before she lays it gently on his grave.

On their way back they call at the lodge to see “little Miss Waif,” as Gerald calls the child whom, a year ago, he found so strangely in the hedge bottom. It has never been claimed, and probably never

will be now. Eleanor has had it christened after herself, and is very fond of it. Gerald, too, has a sneaking sort of liking for the child. He cannot forget that it was while he was holding it in his arms, and blushing to the roots of his hair, that he first saw Eleanor, and first spoke to her. Many a laugh have they had about that incident since their marriage. That the child's future will be carefully looked after we may safely assume.

When ten o'clock strikes, the juveniles troop off to supper, and Sir Thomas button-holes Gerald, and takes him off to the smoking-room. There is something on his mind which he is evidently bursting to confide to Gerald.

“Look here, Pomeroy,” he says—he can’t forget the old familiar name—“I’m going to tell you something that I’ve not told to anybody, and that I wouldn’t have her ladyship know just yet for the world. What do you think? I’ve made up my mind to resign my seat!”

“ You do indeed surprise me ! ” says Gerald.

“ I mention this to you because I think it would be a good chance for you to try to get into parliament yourself. You know, Pomeroy, I always said you were cut out for an M.P.”

“ You flatter me, Sir Thomas. All the same, I’m greatly obliged to you for honouring me with your confidence in this matter, although I shall not be able to do what you have so kindly suggested. My wife and I have made up our minds to travel for a couple of years before I settle down to anything.”

“ Ah, that’s a pity now ! because I could have given you such a lot of support.”

“ May I ask what your motives are for resigning your seat ? ”

“ I’ve found out, Pomeroy, that it was never intended by Nature that I should write M.P. after my name. And then I hate London. I’m never either well in health or happy in mind when I’m there. Give me, instead, what my wife calls ‘ the

dull pursuits of country life.' Though why she should call them dull, I can't for the life of me see. What can be more exciting, for instance, than a show of prize bullocks, or a good ploughing match? And where is there anything in all London half as pretty as a field of wheat on a midsummer morning, especially when the crop's a good one, and the field happens to be your own?"

"It will be a great disappointment to her ladyship."

"That's the deuce of it," says Sir Thomas, with a dismal shake of the head. "Between you and me, I dread telling her. There will be an explosion, my boy—an explosion. But I've made up my mind to go through with it, and go through with it I will."

He jingles the loose change in his pocket and whistles under his breath, but is evidently far from easy in his mind.

It need hardly be said that Eleanor stands higher in the favour of Lady Dudgeon than ever she did before. If she is penniless herself, has she not a husband

who is worth twenty thousand pounds ? Her ladyship could afford to condone much in face of such a golden fact as that. Not that there is anything to condone in the case of Eleanor, as matters have turned out ; but had it unhappily been the case that Gerald was not his uncle's heir, it may be feared that Eleanor's offences would have been altogether past condonation.

The evening wears on, and one after another the young people take their leave, till only a few are left, who are not going home till morning. These, tired out at last with dancing and romping, gather round Ambrose Murray, and beg of him to tell them a fairy tale. So he tells them a tale in which there is a giant and a dwarf, and a castle with walls of brass, and a magic horn that hangs by the gate, and a beautiful princess who is shut up in a dungeon, and a brave knight who has many wonderful adventures and hair-breadth escapes.

When the tale is done, being a little weary, he bids the children a kindly good-

night, then he shakes hands with Sir Thomas and Lady Dudgeon, and asks them to excuse his retiring. Eleanor goes with him to the foot of the stairs, where they kiss each other and say good-night. Eleanor stands and watches him as he goes slowly up the wide staircase, looking very tired, she thinks. He turns when he reaches the landing, and smiles, and waves his hand to her. She blows him a last kiss. Next moment he is gone, and she hurries back to the drawing-room.

When Ambrose Murray reaches his room, he rakes the glowing embers together, and puts out his candle. He often sits in the dark for hours. Then he draws up one of the blinds, and looks out. The atmosphere is very clear, and the sky is brilliant with stars. He stands there for a long time, gazing up at the stars with a rapt look on his face. His thoughts are evidently far away—far away, it may be, from earth and all its weariness and troubles. By-and-by he goes and kneels

down by the side of his bed, and clasps his hands.

And there next morning they find him, still kneeling, still with clasped hands, and with a look of ineffable peace on his white, worn face—of that peace which passeth all understanding.

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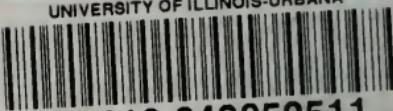
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